UNCLE SAM'S BOYS ON THEIR METTLE

H. IRVING HANCOCK

THE BOYS OF THE ARMY SERIES

"Halt!" Came the Command.

Frontispiece

albert Falls, Ross

Uncle Sam's Boys on Their Mettle

OR

A Chance to Win Officers' Commissions

albert Falls,

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Author of Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks, Uncle Sam's Boys on Field Duty, Uncle Sam's Boys as Sergeants, Uncle Sam's Boys in the Philippines, Uncle Sam's Boys as Lieutenants, The Motor Boat Club Series, The High School Boys Series, The West Point Series, The Annapolis Series, The Young Engineers Series, etc.

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Uncle Sam's Boys on Their Mettle

CHAPTER I

WHAT DID MR. DRANEY FIND OUT?

"HALT!"

The command came crisply from the United States Army sentry on post number three.

A tall, broad-shouldered, florid-faced man, whose shifting eyes and disagreeable mouth belied the affable appearance that he always displayed, stopped in astonishment.

"Sentry," he protested bewilderedly, "I'm not a native or even a foreigner. I'm an American citizen, and——"

"Do you wish to enter the military reservation, sir?" asked the sentry respectfully, as he held his rifle at port arms.

"I do. I wish to see your commanding officer," replied the man.

"On business, sir?" questioned the sentry.

"Is that any of your affair, my man?"

"Yes, sir; I'm asking as a member of the guard."

"Have the rules been changed lately?" demanded Joseph Draney, one of the big planters in the Misamis district of northern Mindanao, the second largest island in the Philippines.

"Yes, sir; do you wish to see the commanding officer on business, or on a social matter?"

"On business, then, my man."

"Corporal of the guard—post number three!" called the sentry.

Down the hard, white shell road came the corporal of the guard, white-gloved and immaculate-looking.

"Corporal of the guard," reported the sentry, "citizen desires to see the commanding officer on a matter of business."

"Very good, sir," replied the corporal, wheeling about and facing the sentry. "Your name, sir?"

"Why, Corporal, you know my name as well as I do," retorted Joseph Draney impatiently.

"Yes, sir," admitted the corporal. "Name, sir."

"Oh, hang it all—Joseph Draney!" almost exploded the planter.

"Very good, sir—Hang-it-all J. Draney."

"No, no, you—pardon me. My name is Joseph Draney."

"Very good, sir. Will you take a seat, Mr.

Draney, until I have had time to ascertain the commanding officer's wishes, sir?"

Corporal Cotter indicated a bench under the shade of a tree nearby, then wheeled and marched off.

But Planter Joseph Draney did not even look at the seat. Down the road a few paces, under the shade of another tree, stood two boyish-looking sergeants. That they were neither boys nor greenhorns, in the military sense, however, was amply attested by the chevrons on their sleeves.

These young sergeants Draney approached, mopping his face with a handkerchief of finest linen.

"What new fool rule is this, boys?" inquired the planter.

"I don't know, sir," answered Sergeant Hal Overton respectfully, and with no suspicion of sarcasm lurking in his voice. "We are not required to memorize fool rules."

"But this new rule of having to send your name in by a butler?" persisted Draney.

"The corporal of the guard is not a butler, sir; nor is the sentry a footman or a door-opener. The corporal of the guard and the sentry on post number three represent the dignity of the United States Government and people at the entrance to this military reservation."

Sergeant Hal Overton spoke quietly, and without warmth, but there was a look in his eyes that caused Joseph Draney, always anxious to keep on good terms with every one, to say quickly:

"I'm afraid I've roiled your feelings, Sergeant. I didn't mean to."

"No, sir; you haven't hurt my feelings. I am quite accustomed to finding that people do not realize that the Army represents the whole people of the United States."

Sergeant Noll Terry, during this brief discussion, had turned his back squarely on Draney and was gazing reflectively off into the distance. Noll did not like Draney, and would be at no pains to hide the fact.

"I hope you'll overlook my stupidity, Sergeant," returned Draney, in his smooth, rather oily voice, "but can you tell me why this new rule about visitors is in effect?"

"No, sir; I cannot. I am not in the confidence of the commanding officer."

This simple reply seemed effectually to close the door to further discussion of the topic. Really a good bit embarrassed by the quiet dignity of this boyish sergeant, Joe Draney imitated Sergeant Noll; he, too, lapsed into silence and stood gazing off at the scenery.

The silence, presently, was punctuated by

the brisk steps of Corporal Cotter returning.

"Mr. Draney," began the corporal of the guard, halting, clicking his heels together and standing at attention, "the commanding officer will see you at once if you wish. In that case, sir, I am to conduct you to his office."

"Thank you, Corporal. Lead the way, please."

As Corporal Cotter and Planter Draney passed the sentry he threw his rifle over at port until the pair had passed, after which he elevated the rifle to his right shoulder and continued pacing his post.

"Why did you give that fellow the satisfaction of having any words with him, Hal?" almost grumbled Sergeant Terry.

"I was merely courteous to him," Hal answered.

"But why waste courtesy on a cur like him?"

"Do you forget the regulations and our general instructions, Noll?" asked Hal. "We soldiers are always impressed with the fact that the Army belongs to the nation and that soldiers must be courteous at all times to citizens."

"I'd like to lay a long wager," muttered Noll, "that Draney lied."

"In what?"

"In claiming to be an American citizen."

"Well," returned Hal dryly, "I share your dislike of the idea that Draney can be an American, but it would seem almost like an affront to another nation to make Draney out a citizen of that particular nation."

"Of course we both know," went on Noll, dropping his voice, even though the sentry was the only other human being very near them, "that we are on the brink of more trouble which disgruntled natives are going to start in this Misamis district."

"All the signs point to it," Hal assented; "even to the new rule denying visitors entrance to the reservation except upon the order of an officer."

"And you and I both know—none better—from our own experiences with the late Vicente Tomba, who fell with soldiers' bullets in him, that Tomba was only the tool, the agent in mischief, of this same Joe Draney. For some unholy reason Draney is hand-and-glove with all the mischievous, insurgent leaders of the Moros. You and I know well enough that Draney is really a Moro chieftain, and that he profits directly from all the blackmail that the rebel leaders extort from planters who want to save their lives and properties from Moro bullets and steel."

"You and I don't doubt that that is true," corrected Hal. "But we couldn't prove it, if we tried."

"I wonder that Captain Cortland doesn't order the guard to kick Draney away from the gate!"

"Would *you,* Noll, if you were commanding officer here?"

Sergeant Terry hesitated.

"No-o-o; I don't suppose I would," he admitted.

"And neither can Captain Cortland, no matter how much he may feel like it. Noll, as far as any one connected with the American Army can prove to the contrary, Joseph Draney is an American citizen, a prominent and wealthy planter here. Also, for all you or I, or any one else at Fort Benjamin Franklin could dispute it, Draney is as greatly respected as he is wealthy. Now, Captain Cortland, as the representative here of American power, law and dignity must treat Draney at least decently and courteously until he can prove that Draney is the rascal that you and I believe him to be."

"Why don't the army folks get the proof against Draney, then?" demanded Noll fiercely.

"Why don't you, Noll?" pressed Sergeant Hal. "You certainly belong to the Army as much as any one here at the post. Moreover,

if you can get the needed proof against Draney, Captain Cortland will welcome your proof, and you know it."

"But I can't get the proof," retorted Noll. "Neither can any one else. And yet you and I, from our very experiences in the matter, know to a moral certainty, that the scoundrel, Draney, was the employer and backer of that other utter rascal, the late Vicente Tomba, who was shot down by B Company men acting under your orders at the time that Tomba tried to escape arrest."

As a final vent to his feelings Sergeant Noll Terry turned, scowling fiercely in the direction of the building in which was Captain Cortland's office as commander of the post, and in which office, at that moment, Planter Joseph Draney was undoubtedly seated.

Readers of the preceding volumes in this series will have no difficulty in understanding just what the foregoing conversation was about. Readers of the first volume of the series, "Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks," know how Hal Overton and Noll Terry became seized with the craze for the military life, and how they enlisted with the purpose of making in the Army their careers in life, hoping in the end to secure commissions as officers. In that first volume was described how the two bright young

Americans went through their first training as soldiers in the Regular Army, how they reported for duty with the Thirty-fourth United States Infantry, then on duty in Colorado; how the recruits proved themselves in several exciting adventures, and how they finally came to be accepted by their comrades as real soldiers.

In the second volume, "Uncle Sam's Boys on Field Duty," was described the field training of the young soldiers.

In the third volume, "Uncle Sam's Boys as Sergeants," Hal and Noll were promoted to be sergeants, and enjoyed their first independent commands.

The fourth volume, "Uncle Sam's Boys in the Philippines," details the adventures of the young soldiers in the actual field against the organized foes of the United States, a Moro band of so-called insurgents who were really no better than blackmailing land pirates, led by Datto Hakkat, a Moro chieftain.

Hal and Noll had had many troubles with Vicente Tomba, a young Filipino of the Tagalo tribe. Tomba, failing in a clever scheme to use Hal as an innocent tool, had attempted to bring about the death of the young sergeant, and had nearly succeeded. While Tomba's prisoner Hal had learned more convincingly of Joseph Dra-

ney's connection with the Moro marauders, but Hal had only his own word on which to support the charge, and Captain Cortland, in command of the two companies of the Thirty-fourth stationed at Fort Benjamin Franklin, had wisely concluded to keep these suspicions secret until such time as Draney might be arrested on convincing legal proof.

Vicente Tomba, however, had been caught with the marauders up in the mountains. When ordered to halt Tomba had put on an even greater burst of speed. So Sergeant Hal, acting on orders from an officer, had directed a squad of infantrymen to fire on Tomba, whose death followed an instant later.

Now, the Datto Hakkut was dead, and Tomba, also, but Draney had not even been accused, simply for lack of proof. But again this Misamis district, in the northern portion of the great island of Mindanao seemed threatened with trouble from armed Moro natives.

So far, the trouble had not come to a head. There were not known to be any bands of armed Moros roving the country, and no outrages had been committed as yet. But the white planters and other residents of Misamis had observed unmistakable signs, and had heard ugly rumors from dependable natives.

Captain Cortland, even at the moment when

he was talking with Joseph Draney, knew that a sudden, swift and dangerous uprising was likely to occur at any moment. Hence that able officer was taking all the precautions he possibly could.

Joseph Draney was now in the commanding officer's presence on a clever, diplomatic errand—to find out just how much Captain Cortland knew or suspected.

But Captain Cortland had been trained in the hard school of the Army. He was likely to prove wholly a match even for the smooth, suave Joseph Draney.

"I am glad, indeed, Captain, to hear that you do not look for any trouble with the natives," declared Joe Draney presently.

"I did not quite say that, did I?" inquired Captain Cortland, his manner expressing indifference.

"Why, you said, Captain——"

"That I had had no information of any move against the government by any portion of the natives."

"Have you heard any tangible rumors of such approaching trouble?" asked Draney, trying a new tack.

Captain Cortland yawned behind his hand in bored fashion as he answered indifferently: "Mr. Draney, if I regarded every rumor that

might come to my ears as being so much authentic information, what sort of time would I enjoy as military commander here?"

"You would doubtless have too active a time for it to be a pleasant one," assented the planter promptly. "Then, my dear Captain Cortland, I am entirely safe in assuming that you do not expect any trouble whatever with the natives?"

"Now, on the other hand, Mr. Draney, perhaps that would be saying too much. If no trouble were expected with the natives at any time, do you imagine the United States government would station two companies of infantry here?"

"Yet you do not look for any outbreak in the near future?"

"Mr. Draney, haven't we been over that ground already?" questioned the Army captain, with just a shade of annoyance in his eyes.

Then he added, smoothly, and without visible trace of sarcasm in his voice.

"Of course, Mr. Draney, if you are uneasy over the danger of any Moro raids against your plantation——"

"I can't say that I am," Draney broke in hurriedly. "That is, at any rate, I am in no danger until the other planters are threatened also."

"Now, in our last uprising, Mr. Draney, Seaforth was sadly bothered, and his bookkeeper, Edwards, lost his life, poor fellow. Yet, though you were within sound of the guns being fired at the Seaforth plantation, you were not bothered in the least by the Moros."

"I was four miles nearer to this military post," interjected Mr. Draney quickly.

"Exactly," nodded Captain Cortland. "So I think you are quite safe at any time, Mr. Draney."

"Yes; I am—reasonably so, Captain; and I feel much safer since I have had this talk with you."

"You will understand, of course, Mr. Draney, that as military commander here, I shall take all due pains to protect the planters and other white residents of this section."

Captain Cortland had risen while speaking. It looked like a polite sign of dismissal, so, while Mr. Draney did not relish going just then, he felt bound to rise also.

"I am sure you will do everything in your power for us, Captain, and I am glad to know that you do not regard the present times as having any danger in them. That much is a comfort."

"If you should hear anything, at any time, Mr. Draney, I trust you will come to me," fin-

ished Captain Cortland, holding out his hand. It was a very limp grasp that Draney received in return for his own strong hand clasp.

"Good day, Captain."

"Good day, Mr. Draney. Thank you for calling."

As Joseph Draney's broad shoulders moved down the shell path outside the officer's quarters Captain Cortland regarded the planter through the window, murmuring:

"I shall hope to see you again here, Draney. I trust that it will be on a day when we know enough positively about you to warrant my holding you in one of the cells of the guard house until a transport puts in here to take you away as a prisoner going to his trial!"

While Draney, as he marched along the shell road, was muttering to himself:

"That fellow, Cortland, is an idiot. He doesn't know anything, and isn't interested in learning anything. But, at all events, I learned from him——"

Now, as he thought it over, a puzzled expression crept into the planter's face.

"What did I learn from him, anyway? As I come to think it over it seems to me that, after all, I didn't learn a blessed thing. But at that I guess I learned all the captain knew, for he doesn't know anything. These Regular Army

officers, I guess, are clever enough at leading fighting men against a visible enemy. But as men of the world they're failures. These officers are just automatic fighting machines, and that's all they're good for. Humph! If Captain Cortland even suspected as much as I know about the Moro plans, I don't believe the uniformed idiot would feel like sitting there yawning behind his hand!"

Altogether, Joe Draney felt satisfied with the interview. Captain Cortland knew nothing, thought Draney, suspected nothing, and a military commander of that sort is little hindrance to the schemes of plotters against the government.

The planter was, in fact, in such good humor with himself that, as he stepped past the sentry on post number three, he was smiling broadly. In this pleasant frame of mind Draney, well satisfied with himself, halted short when he encountered Sergeants Overton and Terry, who were slowly strolling back.

"Howdy, young men?" beamed Draney. Then he fished in his pockets and brought out two large, blackish cigars, supposedly of a choice Manila brand.

"Have a smoke, young men?" he inquired, proffering the cigars.

"Thank you, sir," Hal answered, courte-

ously enough. "I don't really know whether I could smoke."

"Don't know whether you could?" repeated Mr. Draney, in some amazement.

"No, sir, I don't know; because, you see, sir, I've never tried."

"You've never—Oh, I see," cried the genial Mr. Draney, breaking into a jovial laugh. "You've never tried. Very good, indeed. But —er—why don't you smoke, Sergeant?"

"Well, you see, sir," Hal replied, "it's just like this. Soldiering is a rather particular business. Anybody can be an imitation soldier; a good many men can be half-way soldiers. But to be a real soldier nowadays requires a lot more brains than most civilians suppose. I have never been able to persuade myself that whiffing and inhaling the fumes from a deadly drug is likely to prove a practice that will keep my brain at the best pitch day and night."

"Pooh!" sniffed Joe Draney. "I've smoked for years and years, and it has never hurt my brain enough to prevent my being a pretty successful business man."

"But do you feel absolutely certain, sir," quizzed Hal, "that the day won't come when the effect of the drug will have reached a stage where you'll lose everything you prize most in

life, and that just because, in some great emergency or time of trial, your brain at last refuses to work quickly enough to save you?"

"Eh?" demanded Joe Draney, and for an instant his eyes swept the young sergeant's face keenly. Somehow, the planter thought he detected a hidden menace in the sergeant's voice. And then, too, the words, "time of trial" grated unpleasantly on the ears of a man who knew as much about himself as Joseph Draney did.

But Hal's face wore a wholly innocent look.

Draney replaced the cigars in his pocket.

"Well, good day, Sergeants," he remarked pleasantly. "I shall hope to see you later."

"I hope so," murmured Noll Terry, in too low a voice for the planter to overhear him, "and, wherever it is, I hope I'll be sergeant of the guard, too."

"All great minds must run in the same channel, Noll," laughed his soldier chum. "I was just thinking what a nice picture Joseph Draney's face would make——"

"What?" Noll broke in indignantly.

"Framed by the perpendicular bars of the guard house cell," finished Sergeant Hal.

"Oh!" agreed Noll instantly.

In the meantime the planter was strolling

slowly along the hot road that led into the little port town of Bantoc.

"I wonder that the fellow doesn't use his carriage, or at least ride a horse," muttered Noll, following the receding figure with his eyes.

Sergeant Hal was forced to laugh again.

"Apparently not the slightest thing that our excellent Draney does can satisfy you."

"Only one thing," rumbled Noll. "If Draney would give himself up to the hangman it would suit me perfectly."

"But he won't. And, oh, see here, Noll, we appear to have come mighty close to forgetting that we have a pass to go into Bantoc this afternoon. Have you changed your mind about wanting to go?"

"I hate to do anything that will place me in the same town with Draney," muttered Noll.

"Oh, bosh! Besides, who knows but that, in Bantoc, we may fall afoul of Draney's real trail."

"If I thought that I'd be warm to use my pass."

"You'll be warm, anyhow," smiled Hal Overton. "It's almost Thanksgiving Day, but where is the snow of our home town?"

Noll answered by producing a handkerchief and mopping his face, for the tropical heat

seemed to be fairly pouring down upon the young soldiers out of the clear blue sky.

November in Mindanao is not one of the cool months. There aren't any cool months in Mindanao. But the rainy season was over, and the dry season on in full force. It was hotter, far, than in what we know as the summer months. In the dry season any passing wind catches up a cloud of dust from the roads and covers everything with the fine powder.

"It's almost too hot to go," urged Sergeant Noll Terry, after the chums had covered a quarter of the distance.

"If it isn't too hot for Draney it ought not to be for us," replied Hal Overton with decision.

"See here, chum, are you in earnest about expecting to get on Draney's real trail in Bantoc?"

"I'm in earnest about wanting to," replied Sergeant Overton.

Had either young sergeant suspected what was almost immediately ahead the pair would have quickened their steps, regardless of the heat.

CHAPTER II

HOP LING'S EGGS AND "TIPS"

IN the blistering heat of this November afternoon the streets of sleepy little Bantoc looked sleepier than ever.

Yet Hal and Noll strolled through the streets for an hour. They hoped at least to catch a distant glimpse of Joseph Draney, for that fellow's visit to the commanding officer, of whose purpose neither sergeant knew anything, had made them both curious.

At last, however, the oppressive heat drove the young sergeants into the only place where they could find rest, comparative coolness and comfort. This was the ice cream place kept by Hop Ling.

American ice cream, made by a Philippine Chinaman, isn't quite the dish to which Americans are accustomed at home, but it is at least cool, and it takes less to satisfy one.

Hop Ling had a little "parlor," where his customers usually sat in rainy weather. But in this clear-skied weather of the dry season the customers nearly always chose to sit in the shaded little garden at the rear of the parlor. It was here that Hal and Noll eventually found

themselves, and they were the only customers in the garden.

"What flavors have you, Hop?" asked Sergeant Hal.

"All kind," declared the Chinaman gravely.

"Bring me some strawberry," ordered Hal.

"No catch him stlawbelly," replied Hop placidly.

"I want some banana," from Sergeant Noll.

"No catch him blanan," affirmed Hop.

"See here, you solemn heathen, what kind have you got?" demanded Hal Overton.

"Catch him vanilla—and vanilla—and vanilla," said the yellow-faced man solemnly.

"I guess I'll have some vanilla, then," decided Hal.

"And I'll have some vanilla," guessed Noll.

"Oh, see here, Hop," Hal went on, calling the Chinaman back; "we don't think much of that cream you make with duck's eggs. Can't you give us cream made with hen's eggs?"

"No sabby him 'egg'; no sabby him 'duck'," declared Hop, more gravely than ever.

"Oh, bother the Chinaman! Let him bring us sawdust," grunted Noll in disgust.

"No sabby him 'sawdust'," continued Hop resignedly. *"Que quiere usted?"* (What do you want?)

Hop Ling, after the manner of his kind, was

falling back on Spanish, which is much easier for a Chinaman to learn than English.

"What's the Spanish for 'duck', Noll." whispered Hal.

"Blamed if I can remember, but I know the word well enough at that," replied Noll.

"You seem to," grinned Hal. "Well, then, what is the Spanish word for 'hen'?"

"It's——" began Sergeant Terry, promptly enough, then paused. "Hang it all, I can't recall that Spanish word either."

Hop Ling, who seemed to be in no hurry, remained standing patiently by the table.

"See here, Hop," began Hal over again, in desperation, "you *sabe* ice cream?"

"Sabby ice cleam, all light," assented Hop cheerfully. "Catch him vanilla—and vanilla—and——"

"Oh, stow that! Save it to load your gun with," broke in Hal impatiently. "Hop, we *no quiero* ice cream *con huevos* quack-quack; *Quiero huevos* cut-cut—ka-dahkut! *Entiende?*"

By which Hal sought to convey that they didn't want ice cream made with duck's eggs, but cream made with hen's eggs. Hal wound up by inquiring if the Chinaman understood.

"Oh, yep; me sabby all light," responded the yellow-faced one. "Me catch him number one ice cleam, too."

Flop-flop sounded the heels of Hop's slippers as he trudged away. He was gone so long that the young soldiers nearly forgot what it was that they were waiting for. But at last Hop appeared with a tray holding two small porcelain dishes, each well-heaped with a yellowish frozen compound.

"Is this ice cream, Hop?" quizzed Hal.

"Yep; him ice cleam, all light," returned the Chinaman, setting down the dishes and two spoons.

"It's cold, anyway, whatever it is," murmured Noll, dipping his spoon into the dish. Then he tasted it. "I suppose, Hal, your cream is made with hen's eggs?"

"No; duck," rejoined Hal Overton, making a slightly wry face after tasting. "Oh, what's the use, Noll? When you're buying from a Chinaman just tell him how much money you have, and let him bring what he pleases. It's the easiest way, and he'll do it anyway."

"When I quit the Army," declared Noll, "I'm going into the business of raising chickens down here in Mindanao. I see my way to a fortune easily made."

"When you quit the Army," retorted Hal, "you'll be too old to raise chickens, and you won't have any more teeth than a hen."

"Oh, I suppose so," sighed Noll. "When a

fellow is in the Army he finds a lot to grumble about, and he's often thinking about quitting the service. But when the time comes to do it he realizes, all of a sudden, that there's nothing back in civil life that is quite as good as the Army after all."

The two young soldiers ate their cream slowly. Then Hal secured a copy of a Manila daily, two weeks old, tore it in half and gave Noll one portion of it. They sat there and read industriously, trying to pick out the few bits of American news that the paper contained. Half an hour later Hal rapped on the table.

"Hop, I'm going to have some ice cream, and this time make it—vanilla," ordered Hal.

"And I'm going to have vanilla," Noll announced resolutely.

"Him plenty good, allee same cut-cut-ka-dahkut," observed Hop Ling benevolently.

"Hop," demanded Noll, "where did you get your hen's eggs?"

"Oh, him easy," beamed the Chinaman. "Man come house-side and want him hen egg. Use only half as many duck egg; him allee same hen egg."

"Great Scott! What a brilliant mind the chink has," gasped Noll, when Hop had departed with a flop-flop of slippers. "For hen's

eggs he uses half as many duck's eggs as his recipe calls for."

"The reasoning is flawless," returned Sergeant Hal. "Duck's eggs are twice as strong as hen's."

"They're ten times as strong," insisted Noll, making a grimace of disgust.

After eating the second plate of ice cream the young sergeants dawdled away more time over the fragments of the old newspaper. They didn't care about taking that extremely hot road back to the post until the sun had gone lower, and there was no reason why they should, as this was their afternoon of leisure.

By and by they had a third plate of ice cream after which the young soldiers settled. They were preparing to leave the garden, when Hop Ling glided noiselessly out from his little building, went straight up to Sergeant Overton, and whispered cautiously:

"You sabe Joe Dlaney?"

"Yes," nodded Hal, looking keenly at the Chinaman.

"Him no good man," whispered Hop. "Him bad man allee time. You no tell, I tell you. Joe Dlaney him just go in there."

Hop pointed a pudgy thumb at the fence that separated his own garden from the garden of the place next door. The place next door was a

drinking resort, the only one of the kind in Bantoc. It was not much patronized by white men, as it does not take the American long to discover that in the tropics liquor is even more deadly stuff than at home. But some Chinamen, Filipinos and a few Moros patronized the place, and the proprietor made a living after a fashion.

As Hop whispered, Hal caught the sound of footsteps leaving the building next door and entering the garden. Then Draney's voice sounded:

"Come over to this table."

Hop caught Hal by the sleeve, piloting him in utter silence down the ice cream garden to a tiny arbor. Here Hop halted, making a sign for the young sergeant to crawl into hiding. Noll followed like a flash. Then Hop Ling glided back into his building, for once his slippers making no noise as he moved.

"See if there's any one in that next place," sounded Draney's heavy voice, keyed to a low pitch.

A moment later a yellow face showed above the dividing fence. A pair of almond-shaped eyes roved slowly, curiously about. But the owner of the eyes saw no one in Hop's garden. The arbor looked too small to be taken into account.

Then two or three voices sounded in conversation, the tongue appearing to be Chinese. Presently Draney broke in impatiently:

"Oh, stow that sort of talk, you gibbering heathen. Now listen to me. You're sure that the junk will be in at eight to-night?"

"Yep; velly sure," answered another voice. "My one-piecee boy, him see junk down the coast. One-piecee boy him tell me. Then junk sail out, but be in on time, allee light."

"Yes; I guess it will," replied Draney, in a tone of satisfaction. "You Chinese beat the world for doing business straight, taking all risks and holding your tongues like so many clams. Pay a Chinaman enough and he'll risk hanging or any other pleasant fate. And you fellows know me. You know you'll have your money as soon as the cargo's landed. Now, we'll have a little something to drink, and then you yellow fellows get out on your way. It won't do me any good to be seen too much in your company, though the military commandant at Fort Franklin is a stiff, official fool."

A few minutes later Hal and Noll still crouching in their place of hiding, heard the Chinese taking their leave of Draney. Sergeant Hal pulled out a watch, glanced at it, then thrust it back into his pocket. He held up the thumb and fingers of one hand, which Noll un-

derstood to mean that they would give the Chinese five minutes to get away.

From time to time Hal glanced, almost feverishly, at his watch. At last he gave Noll a quick nudge. The two trod stealthily across the garden of the ice cream place, stepped into the building, passed Hop Ling, who blinked at them blandly, and thence passed into the street. Nearly opposite, on the other side, was a little bookstore, which once in a while contained a few "bargains" in books printed in English. From somewhere out of the shadowy back of the store the proprietor, a thin little Spaniard who had once been a clerk under the Spanish government, stepped forward, bowing and smiling.

"It's all right, Señor Viento," Hal greeted the owner pleasantly. "We just want to browse about a bit among the books. If we find anything we're interested in we'll call you."

The Spaniard hesitated, apparently wondering if this were a dismissal. Then, murmuring his apologies, he withdrew into the shadow.

Hal picked up an illustrated book printed in English, then began to turn the pages, pretending to point at the pictures.

"Noll, old chap," whispered Sergeant Overton in quick, low tones, "we wanted to get on Draney's real trail, and, by Jove, we've surely

done it! Draney has a Chinese junk engaged to smuggle some kind of a cargo into this district. Now, Draney isn't an ordinary type of smuggler. He's too rich to need to go into anything like that. Besides, there isn't money enough in smuggling any ordinary merchandise into Mindanao. And Draney is anxious that the military commander shan't know anything about it. So, in view also of Draney's relations with the bad element of the Moros in this island, what do you suppose that smuggled cargo aboard the junk to be?"

"Arms and ammunition," Noll returned, in a whisper.

"It can't be anything else. Now, Noll, I'm almost certain to overstay my leave in town, but I'm going to take that risk for the good of the service. Don't you seem to be in too much of a hurry, but presently you slip out of here, and get back to Fort Frank as soon as you can. Report instanter to Captain Cortland what we've stumbled upon. Now, of course, you can't give the commanding officer any orders. But just urge the captain, very respectfully, Noll, not to send any armed patrol parties out to walk the beach. If that is done, Draney will be sure to have spies who'll discover that the troops are out and active. Ask Captain Cortland, chum, if he won't leave it to just you and

me to shadow Draney, to find out all that's to be learned, and also to discover just where the smuggled cargo is taken and stored."

"I'm ready," whispered Noll Terry.

"And I'll keep on Draney's trail. If you don't find me here you'll have to look me up. But be careful not to be guilty of a move, a word or a look that will betray you to Draney. The mere fact of your being in Bantoc won't make him suspicious. He's used to seeing soldiers from Fort Frank in town on pass."

"Is that all you want to say to me now?"

"Yes; you'll know how to meet anything that may turn up."

"Then I'll be out of here in a minute," Noll promised. Next he raised his voice slightly to say:

"No; I don't call the book interesting. It looks dull to me."

"There are some chapters here that look fairly good," argued Hal.

"Spend your money on it if you like," agreed Sergeant Terry, "but I don't believe I'm book-hungry to-day. Are you going to spend any more time in here?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I'll trot along and look at something else. You'll find me somewhere on the street when you're ready."

With that Sergeant Noll sauntered out of the store. He strolled slowly down the street. Once at the edge of the town, however, Noll Terry quickened his pace wonderfully.

Hal, in the meantime, remained just far enough back in the store so that he felt certain of not being seen from the opposite side of the street. Though seemingly absorbed in another book that he had picked up, the youthful sergeant did not let his gaze really wander away from the front of the wine shop across the street.

After a long hunt, during which the fading afternoon grew darker, Hal finally selected a book and called Señor Viento.

"How much?" asked the young sergeant, holding out the book.

"A *peso,* señor, though it is well worth two."

Hal paid the money.

"I'll look just a little longer," he went on, "but do not let me keep you from your supper, señor. I am a slow book hunter."

It was almost dark when Sergeant Overton saw Joseph Draney leaving the wine shop to cross the street. Hal, with the book under his arm, stepped out to meet the planter face to face.

"Ah, my young friend, we meet again," said Draney amiably.

"So it seems, sir. I thought you would be back at your plantation by this time. Staying in town for the night?"

"I—I——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," broke in Hal quickly, as though much embarrassed. "It is none of my business what your plans are. Sometimes I forget that I am only a plain doughboy sergeant. I didn't intend to be impudent, sir."

"Impudent?" breathed Draney, in astonishment. "Why, Sergeant, I didn't have any thought of that sort in my mind. To tell you the truth I did intend to be back at my house in the woods by this time. But the afternoon has been hot, and I've felt lazy. So I made up my mind to wait in town and have dinner, and drive back in the cool of the evening. I had expected to meet one or two of my business friends, but so far I haven't run across a soul. Sergeant, won't *you* come and dine with me to-night."

"Why, I'd be delighted, sir, but I'm in town with Sergeant Terry. He left me some time ago, and I'm waiting for him to come back."

"Then you won't have to wait long," rejoined Draney, resting a hand on Hal's shoulder and gently swinging him around. Noll was coming up the street at this moment, at a leis-

urely pace, glancing in at the lighted windows of the shops.

"Ask Sergeant Terry to dine with us, too," urged Draney. "I shall be indebted to you both for good company."

Nothing could have been more distasteful to Hal than to accept any courtesy from this fellow. Yet, if he were to shadow Draney how could he do it so well as across a table? And Draney was a malefactor. It seemed worth while playing the secretly hostile guest in order to trap such a scoundrel into Uncle Sam's meshes.

"Get a hike on, Noll," drawled Hal good-humoredly, and Noll, seeming to perceive the pair for the first time, came briskly up.

"Mr. Draney has very kindly invited us both to dine with him," Hal announced, "and I've accepted."

"Mr. Draney is extremely kind," murmured Noll, striving hard to conceal his disgust.

"Wait here just a moment, gentlemen," begged Draney, "while I step into that shop yonder and get some of my favorite brand of cigars."

"Well?" whispered Sergeant Hal breathlessly, as soon as their intending host had disappeared into the shop.

"Captain Cortland sends his compliments to

Sergeant Overton," whispered Noll. "He compliments us both—and orders us to hang on Draney's trail like a pair of leeches. But I wonder if Draney has shaken us already? He may be suspicious, and he may have gone into that tobacco shop only to step out through the back way."

CHAPTER III

THE TREASON OF THE NIGHT

"JUPITER! We'll soon know about that!" promised Sergeant Hal.

He sauntered slowly past the tobacco shop, glancing in through the doorway. Noll looked straight ahead.

Joseph Draney was there, at the counter, and now he came slowly out.

"Now where shall we dine, gentlemen?" asked the planter. "I suppose, however, that's a foolish question. There's only one place in this little tropical tank-town where white men can dine—the Café de Paris."

Now, the only thing French about the Café de Paris was the fact that one of the proprietors was a low-caste Spaniard, and the other a Filipino *mestizo,* or half-breed. It was, however, the only restaurant in Bantoc that made

any pretensions, the other eating-places being small, dingy affairs run by Chinese.

Into this fairly well-lighted and somewhat spacious eating house Draney led his young military guests. They took seats at a table somewhat back from the entrance.

Hal, in glancing casually about, noted that the German physician of Bantoc was dining at one table with a French drug salesman who made the run down once a year from Manila. Three American planters, in town, were dining at another table. The rest of the score of guests were wealthy Moros or members of other Filipino tribes.

No sooner were they seated than both Hal and Noll began to feel decidedly uncomfortable. It seemed, apart from their great object to-night, to be like the basest treachery to be dining as the guests of the man whom they hoped to bring to arrest.

Had they but known, they would have felt more comfortable. For Joseph Draney, noting that all the other white diners present had discovered his military guests, was thinking to himself:

"If any such unlikely thing should happen to-night as my being caught at my trick, I'll denounce these two boys as being in the plot with me! I hate 'em both worse than poison

ever since the time when they put my useful Vicente Tomba under the sod. Confound 'em both! I'd be almost willing to be caught for the sake of being able to denounce them to their own commanding officer. And every white man in the room sees that they're dining with me."

Nothing of these thoughts, however, showed in the falsely genial face of the rascally planter as he picked up the menu card and ran his glance over the contents. After consulting his guests the planter ordered a very good dinner.

"And now, what kind of wine shall we have?" he asked.

"No wine at all for us, Mr. Draney," spoke up Hal promptly. "We never touch anything like that."

"Sensible lads!" nodded their host approvingly. Then, remembering that he himself needed a clear head to-night, free from any befuddling influences, the planter decided not to order any wine for himself.

During the meal, which was an excellent one, Draney talked well. His conversation would have been highly interesting, had it not been for the intense dislike both young sergeants felt for him. Yet even Noll Terry hid that dislike well to-night, and talked freely.

At last the meal was finished, and Draney paid for it. He lighted one of his cigars, lean-

ing back in his chair. Hal noted that he consulted his watch from time to time.

"Hullo, I'm near forgetting something," he ejaculated, at last. "I must go back to the kitchen to see one of the proprietors about a case of canned peppers that he has promised to ship up to my house."

Picking up his hat, Draney excused himself, then sauntered out through the door that opened into the kitchen.

"This is where we move, too," Hal murmured in a low tone. "Draney isn't coming back. He has shipped us, he thinks, and will leave here through the back way."

The young sergeants secured their campaign hats, stepped out into the street, and were speedily in hiding in the shadows at the rear of the Café de Paris.

In a moment the rear door opened. Draney stepped out, looked swiftly about him, saw no one else in sight, and then turned briskly down a side street that led to the water front.

"It isn't decent in him to deceive two trusting young souls in such shabby fashion," Noll whispered exultantly in his chum's ear.

It was a moonless night, and such a night, in the tropics, is a few degrees darker than it is anywhere else. Ere Draney had gone far he was being followed by two stealthy figures in

the tropical service uniform of the United States Army.

"My, but he'll be mad when he finds out!" mimicked Noll in a whisper.

"All I'm hoping is that he won't find out too soon," returned practical Sergeant Hal. "But we don't want to do any more talking than is necessary. Let's keep our whole attention on the scoundrel!"

"The scoundrel who bought our meal tickets to-night!" whispered Noll vengefully.

"We had to do that to win."

Presently Draney had left the town behind. Nor was he headed for the water front that surrounded the little bay that was the harbor of Bantoc. Instead, he turned to his left, going down a tree-lined road that led somewhat in the direction of Fort Benjamin Franklin, which post the soldiers called "Fort Frank" for short.

Hal and Noll kept prudently well behind him, yet they did not lose the trail of their important quarry.

Every now and then Draney stopped and listened, but at such times our two young sergeants proved themselves altogether too good scouts to allow themselves to be caught. Their former training, both on field service in Colorado, and in war service on the island

of Mindanao, stood them in good stead now.

Finally Draney's walk became brisker. He passed the military post, going between that and the water, and kept on for some distance beyond.

"Draney probably won't reach his destination by eight o'clock," Hal told himself. "It must be past that hour now. However, this smooth rascal can be pretty well depended upon to know what he's about."

Three-quarters of a mile past the fort, close to the ocean side, Draney entered a mango grove. Hal and Noll still followed.

"Here, master!" called a voice. Five Chinese stepped up out of the thick grass so rapidly that Draney thrust a hand to one of his hip pickets, then withdrew his hand, smiling.

"I see you're on hand, Wing."

"Yes, master."

"And where's your junk?"

"Him out—over there," replied Wing, pointing out over the water.

At the meeting with the Chinamen Hal had thrust out a hand, detaining Noll by the sleeve. Here was a point at which the two young scouts would do well to move with caution. There could be no telling just how many more yellow-faced men there might be lolling about in the grass. It would never do for the two

sergeants from Fort Franklin to betray themselves by stepping upon some of the party.

"How soon can you get the goods in, Wing?" demanded Draney.

"Him plenty soon," answered the Chinaman. "You watchee this."

Wing produced a dark lantern, turning it toward the quiet, smooth sea beyond. Three times in quick succession the Chinaman opened and covered the light-shield, thus sending three flashes out over the water. In answer, from some point out yonder, a single steady glow appeared for about thirty seconds.

By this time Hal and Noll were now able to make out the craft over yonder, though they saw her lines vaguely in the dark. The "junk" was really an old, all-but-condemned, three-masted schooner. However, to a Chinaman all craft that sail are junks.

"You catch him goods land-side plenty soon now," declared Wing.

Nor was it long before the sound of oars came in from over the water. A small boat was nearing the beach. Wing turned, rapidly uttering some words in Canton Chinese to one of his fellow Chinese. The man trotted off obediently.

There was the sound of a boat's keel grating on the sand. Draney hastened down

to the water's edge, followed by the Chinese.

"How many cases have you in the boat?" called Draney in a low voice.

"Six," answered a voice in English. "All we can bring at a trip."

"How many in all?"

"Forty."

"You'll hurry them?"

"We'll have them all ashore in twenty-five minutes," replied the voice of the man in command of the boat. "We're working three boats. Two more will be here in a minute."

"Noll," whispered Sergeant Hal, placing his lips close to one of his chum's ears, "you light out of here softly. There won't be time to get troops here, perhaps, but get word to Captain Cortland so that he can have a squad posted on every road leading away from this spot. Hustle!"

"Trust me," murmured Noll, and was off in the darkness. Though Sergeant Overton listened intently he heard no further sound from Terry.

"Noll has got away all right," murmured Hal to himself.

Soon after the Chinaman who had been sent away by Wing returned, walking beside two carts, each drawn by a sorry-looking native pony.

Eacn cart carried several cases of vegetables. Wing and his helpers now busied themselves with lifting off the vegetable cases. The cases that had been brought ashore on the first small boat were lifted into one of the carts. After two other small boats had come in, and the cases from these had been lifted to the same cart, Wing and his fellows began to pile the cases of vegetables over all.

Hal Overton, in the meantime, had managed to work himself, on his stomach, close enough to see what went on without being detected.

"Well, of all the smart tricks!" muttered Sergeant Hal. "Why, when these carts are completely packed they look like carts going into town from a Chinese garden truck farm. Wing and his yellow cronies could lead these carts past a whole company of infantry without being suspected!"

Then, by degrees, Hal worked himself back to the spot at which Sergeant Terry had left him.

The boats came in on their second trip, and now that same English-speaking voice reported:

"You have all your cases ashore, sir."

"Good!" replied Draney. "You know where to get your money?"

"We understand that, sir. Chinese mer-

chants are honest over debts. We have no fear about getting our money."

The boats pulled off into the darkness. Almost immediately Hal heard a creaking, off to seaward. He realized that sails were being hoisted aboard the schooner, and that the craft was standing offshore in the light night breeze.

"I wish we could have caught that smuggler craft," muttered the young sergeant. "However, we may be thankful that we've stopped the contraband—and Draney!"

The planter stood by watching the Chinese finish the loading and disguising of their second cart.

"Wing, you rascal, that trick would fool an old-timer like me," chuckled Mr. Draney.

"Him plenty good tlick," grinned Wing. "Melican soldier-man, him no hard to fool."

"Oh, he isn't, eh?" flared Hal. "We'll see about that mighty soon."

He was startled out of his reverie by a light touch on the arm. Noll, panting hard, had returned.

"Just as you said, Hal, there wasn't any time to bring troops with me," whispered Sergeant Noll. "I had to run nearly all of the way. But you'll find a squad of men guarding whichever road these rascals may take. I never saw Captain Cortland so delighted. But he

specially charged me that, whatever happened, we were to catch Draney and make sure of him."

"All loaded, Wing?" sounded Draney's low voice at this moment.

"Yes, master."

"Then start your carts along."

"You allee same go too, master?" questioned Wing.

"I'll go a short distance with you—not all of the way."

For five minutes the two carts creaked along over the road. Draney and Wing walked beside the second one.

Not far away stealthily moved those two practiced young scouts, Sergeants Overton and Terry. The slight creaking of the carts helped to drown the sound of the scouts' footsteps.

"Halt!" came the prompt military command, out of the darkness. It was Corporal Hyman's voice.

Then, almost at the horses' heads appeared seven men in uniform. Wing and his Chinese helpers stood as if rooted to the ground, their yellow skins turning to a greenish gray with fright, while their legs quaked under them.

Not a moment did Draney lose, nor a sound did he make, save with his feet, as he turned

sharply to his right, racing for the jungle beyond.

So swift was his flight that the planter might have escaped, but it was his bad fortune to run almost into the arms of Hal and Noll.

They were unarmed as they leaped in his path. Draney saw that, and his revolver flashed in the dark.

"You young hounds!" Draney snarled, hoarsely. "I may not get away—neither shall you!"

Swift as the thought the planter pushed the muzzle almost against Sergeant Hal's chest and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER IV

IN A GUARD-HOUSE CELL

A FACTORY girl in Connecticut was responsible for what followed, for a carelessly primed cartridge failed to explode.

Before Draney could pull the trigger again Noll Terry dived in under, and came up, landing a blow on Draney's chin that staggered him and sent him to the ground.

Hal leaped forward, throwing himself across the foe. Noll Terry sprang at the revolver

hand, trying to force the weapon from the frenzied grasp.

Yet Joseph Draney, when driven into such a desperate corner, developed amazing strength. Like a tiger he fought, keeping hold of the weapon and seeking to turn it on his intending captors.

"Sergeant Overton!" rang the voice of Corporal Hyman.

"Here!" panted Hal, while the ferocious struggle continued.

"I'll get one or both of you before help comes!" raved Joe Draney, now fighting with all the strength of a maniac.

But Hal and Noll held on for a few moments more. Then Hyman bounded onto the scene. Taking in the situation at first glance the corporal landed the butt of his rifle on Draney's head. That ended the fight. Before he had recovered enough to make any more trouble the planter was securely ironed at the wrists.

"Now, get up!" ordered Hal, dragging the planter to his feet. "If you can't stand we'll let you ride on one of the carts."

Draney could walk. At first he was dizzy, but a soldier held his arm on one side, steadying him for the first hundred yards or so.

Never did men look more innocent and astounded than the captured Chinese, who

swore, by all their heathen gods, that they had been doing nothing wrong.

"I don't say that you have," returned Hal grimly. "But we'll take you and your carts up fort-side and ask the captain-man."

"We go now?" queried Wing blandly.

"Yes; but with us. You're prisoners until the captain passes on your cases. Fall in there by your carts, and any Chinaman that tries to run away will have his yellow skin shot full of holes."

Patiently the Chinese fell in where ordered, and stolidly they trudged along.

Draney was silent, but furiously silent. He was so angry that he did not dare trust himself to speak. His greatest regret, at this moment, was over the defective cartridge that had saved Sergeant Hal Overton's life.

"If I ever get that soldier-rat where I can settle with him I won't lose a second in ridding the earth of him!" was the captured planter's vengeful thought.

In time the squad and its prisoners reached the entrance to Fort Benjamin Franklin.

"I can't let you in without orders, Sergeant," declared the soldier on duty at the gate.

"Very good, sentry; pass the word, if you please."

The corporal of the guard was called; he in turn passed the word for the sergeant of the guard. The sergeant sent the corporal for the officer of the day, but instead came Captain Cortland.

"Got everything, did you, Sergeant Overton?" asked the commanding officer, noting with especial satisfaction the bulky form of the rascally planter."

"Yes, sir."

"Very good, Sergeant; march the whole outfit to the guard house. I will go along with you."

"Right here and now, Captain Cortland," cried Joseph Draney, "I desire to protest against this outrageous——"

"Silence, fellow," uttered Cortland, so sternly that the planter shriveled, though inwardly he shook with wrath.

With no unnecessary delay Draney was locked by himself in a cell in the guard house. The Chinese were ordered to squat on the ground. With the members of the guard looking on, these yellow men knew better than to make any effort to escape.

Then the unloading of the wagons was begun by Hyman's squad, while rockets were sent up as a signal for the recall of the squads that had been sent to watch other roads.

Tools were brought, and the long cases were opened. Four hundred Mauser rifles and half a million cartridges were thus discovered.

"A very important haul, Sergeant," exclaimed Captain Cortland. "You and Sergeant Terry have done a magnificent piece of work this day."

"And the prisoner in the guard house is worth more to us than all this stuff," thought the post commander in his own mind.

Then Captain Cortland stepped into the guard house.

"If you've anything to say, Draney, I'll listen to you," announced the post commander.

"Will you order your fellows to let me out of this cell, and take me where I may talk with you as one gentleman to another?" demanded the planter, stiffly.

"I will not. Is that all you have to say?"

"Captain, your men have made a most hideous mistake."

"I think not. You have been under surveillance, Draney, for several hours. Your every move is known to us, and also your connection with the load that the carts contained."

"Captain Cortland, I give you my word of honor that I had no knowledge that the boxes contained munitions of war," declared Joe Draney solemnly.

"Then where did you get any idea of what the cases contained?" demanded Captain Cortland, dryly. "We have not told you."

Draney realized his mistake, and bit his lip.

"I—I heard some of your men talking outside," he stammered.

"I do not believe you, Draney," replied Captain Cortland, turning on his heel. "And I perceive, clearly enough, that you have nothing of value to say."

Immediately Captain Cortland summoned his officers over to the little building in which his executive office was located. He discussed with his officers all that he knew so far.

"But it seems to me, Cortland," broke in Captain Freeman, "that we haven't got Draney as hard as we'd like to have him."

"True, and I've been thinking a lot about that," nodded Cortland. "We have, apparently, a very clear case against the fellow for being concerned in the landing of arms on this coast. But we are not prepared to prove, legally, that the fellow has any direct connection with a planned insurrection by some of the Moros. We have no proof whatever of the fellow's past connection with the Moro rebels. That is the great fact of all that we ought to prove, and we simply haven't a shadow of real

evidence along those lines. We can have Draney locked up for a year or two, perhaps, but the fellow is so dangerous to life and peace on this island of Mindanao that he ought to be shut up for life. In that I am afraid we are going to fail."

"Why not send, sir, for Sergeants Overton and Terry, and ask them to go over the whole story again?" suggested Lieutenant Ray, of C Company.

"Thank you, Ray, for your suggestion. It will be as well that we do it. I will send at once. Corporal of the guard!"

Hal was ranking sergeant of B Company, with the one exception of Gray, the first sergeant. Sergeant Gray had been hurt a few months before, and had spent much time in hospital, but was now back on duty. So it was Sergeant Gray who hunted up Overton and Terry, found them at a corner of the barracks porch, and told them that were wanted.

"Sergeant Overton, and Sergeant Terry," began Captain Cortland, when the two young sergeants reported, saluted and stood at attention before the assembled officers, "we have been going over the evidence that we have in hand, and find that we wish we had more. Sergeant Overton, you begin back with this afternoon and tell us all that you can remember.

Then Sergeant Terry may add anything that you have overlooked in your statement."

When both sergeants had finished, however, there was silence for a few moments. The young sergeants, not having been dismissed, still remained, standing at attention.

"What do you think, Captain Freeman?" inquired the post commander.

"It's about as I understood it," Freeman answered. "I wish we had a more complete case to send up to Manila with the prisoner."

"So do I," assented Captain Cortland. "But we cannot manufacture evidence that does not exist."

"It looks to me as though we should be rid of Draney as long as we remain here, sir," added Lieutenant Hampton. "But he'll be back here later on to stir up a world of trouble for our successors."

"That is unfortunately just the case," nodded Captain Cortland, rather gloomily.

"Being "youngsters" among the officers Lieutenants Prescott and Holmes did not volunteer their opinions.

To offset any possible, rushing attack that Moros might make on the guard house in the night Captain Cortland ordered C Company out of barracks, to camp around the guard house for the night.

CHAPTER V

SERGEANT NOLL LOSES HIS MENTAL BALANCE

WITH the changing of the guard the next morning Hal Overton came on as sergeant of the guard.

On arriving at the guard house his first act was to look in at the cell where Joseph Draney, having finished his breakfast, was pretending to read.

"All comfortable, prisoner?" asked Hal, not unkindly, but the planter answered only with a black scowl.

Then the young sergeant of the guard carefully examined the lock of the cell door.

"Private Kelly!"

"Sergeant?"

"You will make the care and watching of this prisoner your especial care."

"Very good, Sergeant."

"Whenever I may be called away from here I will turn over to you, Kelly, the key of this cell. But you will use it only in the greatest emergency, such as fire or other disaster threatening the guard house. Otherwise you will open the cell door only by order of the commanding officer, or of the officer of the day."

"Very good, Sergeant."

"You understand your instructions thoroughly?"

"Thoroughly, Sergeant."

Hal stepped away, going over and standing in the open doorway.

"The important young general!" sneered Draney.

Hal paid no heed to him. He had no wish to fight with a man that was down, besides which fact the military regulations are very strict about abuse or any maltreatment of a prisoner.

"Oh, you little sneak!" snarled Draney, showing his teeth.

But Hal Overton seemed hard of hearing.

"You little military jumping-jack!"

Overton, apparently, failed to hear this second scathing remark. From time to time Draney hurled epithets at the youthful sergeant, but none of them found a mark.

Three times, that morning, in the absence of the sergeant of the guard, Kelly was given the key to the guard house.

"Oh, I'd like to buy that little key from you," Draney began, with a coaxing smile.

"Against the regulations, sir," replied Kelly, with soldierly brevity, and turned away. Draney made other efforts to draw the soldier into conversation, but without avail.

Dinner was brought, and the planter, who had already cheered himself greatly with plans for escaping the consequences of his acts, ate with great relish.

"Now, if you'll bring me some cigars?" hinted the planter to Slosson, who had brought the prisoner the tray of food.

"You'll have to ask the officer of the day, sir, and he, I believe, would be obliged to seek permission from the commanding officer," replied Sergeant Hal, after locking the cell door after the departing Slosson.

Draney replied only with a scowl. He would beg for nothing through this sergeant of the guard.

But it was tedious in that cell, with nothing to do. Finally, the sheer monotony drove Draney to his cell door, for, through the iron grating, he could obtain a considerable glimpse of the outside world through the open doorway of the guard house.

Ten minutes later Draney, still looking out, heard two impatient voices near the doorway.

"Sergeant," remarked Lieutenant Greg Holmes, who was officer of the day, "I consider your language impertinent."

"I can't help what you consider it," retorted Noll almost angrily. "Soldiers have a few rights that officers can't ride over. I know

my rights, and I'm going to stick to them."

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho!" chuckled Draney under his breath. "Go it, you little bantam! Assert yourself! Go as far as you like. Shoot the officer and have done with it! That will suit me!"

"Sergeant," broke in Lieutenant Holmes's voice, stern and bordering on anger, "no officer will try to ride over your rights, but I must insist on respectful answers. And when you answer me or any other officer, do not fail to use the word 'sir.'"

The two disputants had now halted before the doorway of the guard house. It would seem as though the spot itself should have recalled the youthful, hot-headed sergeant to his senses. But Noll was plainly too angry to be cautious.

"Oh, you make me tired!" he growled. "You and all the other wearers of shoulder-straps at sixty-nine cents a pair."

"Good! Great! That's the way to talk to an officer!" glowed the planter inwardly as he listened with keen delight. "Send for your friend, Overton, and get him to talk the same way!"

"Sergeant Terry, you've gone too far," broke in Lieutenant Holmes, speaking with unmistakable heat now. "I order you to be silent,

and I shall at once report your language to the commanding officer."

"Report, then!" sneered Noll, his face dark with rage. "Report as soon as you like."

"Careful, Sergeant!" warned Lieutenant Holmes, resting one hand on Noll's shoulder as if to admonish him.

But Noll threw off the officer's hand, and that, too, with a good deal more violence than was necessary.

"Hurrah!" cheered Joe Draney silently.

"Stop that, Sergeant!" thundered Lieutenant Holmes. "I order you under arrest now—no; I'll take you inside myself, and——"

"You will, will you, you——" flared Noll.

Lieutenant Holmes bounded forward, reaching for the young sergeant. But Noll drew back. Then, with such suddenness that it took the watching planter's breath, Noll Terry let his fist fly. It caught Lieutenant Holmes squarely in the chest, sending him to the earth.

But the lieutenant was on his feet in an instant. Draney looked to see the officer of the guard. But, instead, Lieutenant Holmes called coolly:

"Guard!"

Kelly and the other members who were lounging about sprang to obey.

"Place Sergeant Terry under arrest!"

There was a struggle, though only a brief one. Sergeant Noll, now throwing all sense of restraint to the winds, turned on his comrades, fighting like an enraged wild beast. Sheer force and weight of numbers soon counted. Noll was hustled inside the guard house.

"Sergeant of the guard!" called Lieutenant Holmes, and the sentries took it up. Hal was swiftly on the spot.

"Open the door of that cell, Sergeant," ordered Lieutenant Holmes, pointing.

For an instant Hal made no move to obey. He glanced at his chum, held by the other soldiers, and poor Overton's jaw dropped.

"Sergeant Overton, hurry up," exclaimed the lieutenant impatiently.

"May I ask, sir, who the prisoner is?" Hal spoke weakly.

"Yes; though it's none of your business, Sergeant. I have placed Sergeant Terry under arrest for knocking me down."

Hal gave a great gulp, then, like one in a dream, he ran over the keys in his care, selected one and shot back the bolt of the door of the cell next to Draney's.

Noll stepped in without resistance. He had cooled enough at least to realize that it would be folly to fight the guard.

"Lock the door, Sergeant!"

As soon as he had seen the command executed Lieutenant Holmes turned briskly on his heel and went out through the doorway. Hal followed him that far, then stood watching the departing officer.

At last Sergeant Overton turned to remark, in a low tone to Kelly, who stood beside him:

"Has the world turned upside down, Kelly?"

"I don't know, Sarge."

"Did Sergeant Terry really—but of course there can be no doubt——"

"There were some angry words exchanged, and Sergeant Terry surely did knock down the officer of the day," replied Private Kelly, with many shakes of his head.

Finally Sergeant Hal mastered his emotion enough to turn and glance in the direction of the cell in which Noll Terry was safely confined.

After gulping two or three times without speaking Sergeant Hal started down the steps of the guard house.

"Your turn next, Overton, you quartermaster's rat," Joseph Draney called mockingly.

"Kelly," whispered Noll Terry.

The soldier turned, shook his head warningly, then, after the fight between duty and inclination, he came over in front of Noll's cell door.

"Kelly, you're not going back on me, are you?" Noll demanded.

"I'm sure I don't want to," responded Private Kelly. "But what can I do?"

"I suppose I will have to stand court-martial."

"Niver the doubt of that, Sarge," responded Kelly.

"And you'll be one of the witnesses."

"Sure, I'm afraid so."

"Kelly, you might fail to be sure whether you saw me hit the officer of the day."

"Now, how could I fail about that, Sarge?" demanded Kelly. "When I was looking straight at ye with both eyes and ears?"

"I thought you were a friend of mine, Kelly," urged Sergeant Terry.

"What good would it do me to be telling such yarns, Sarge, when other members of the guard saw it, too?"

"You could ask them to testify the same way that you do," answered Noll.

"Oh, sure, I could ask them, but d'ye think they'd testify against what they saw?"

"Then, Kelly, I'm afraid you're none too good a friend of mine," retorted Noll in a more sulky tone.

Kelly tried to speak, choked up, then turned and walked over to the doorway. Draney

looked and listened with intense delight. It all afforded him keen happiness.

"Now, if only that sneaking, spying Overton would go and do something as bad!" thought the planter with wicked wistfulness.

Kelly half-turned in the doorway, muttering and shaking his head.

Noll Terry did not answer. By and by Kelly once more stepped over to the door of Noll's cell.

"Why did ye do it, Sarge?"

"You don't know what I've had to stand from Lieutenant Holmes," returned Noll Terry bitterly.

"I know," Kelly nodded slowly, reluctantly.

"Private Kelly!" called Sergeant Hal from the doorway. "I am summoned to report to the commanding officer. Here are the keys of the two cells that are occupied."

"Very good, Sergeant," replied Kelly, receiving the keys.

Hal was gone for perhaps fifteen minutes. When he came back his face was working.

"Kelly"—the youthful sergeant of the guard spoke brokenly—"give me the keys and step outside a moment."

In silence Private Kelly obeyed.

"Oh, Noll! Why did you do that fearful thing?" demanded Sergeant Hal.

"Because he's twice, ten times, the man that you are," jeered Draney harshly.

"I'm glad I did it," Noll went on bitterly.

"Don't say that, Noll!"

"Pooh!" sneered Sergeant Terry. "What can a court-martial do to me? Reduce me to the ranks, of course; take away my sergeant's chevrons. Bosh! What do I care about that? And the court may give me a bob-tail discharge and send me to serve a year at a military prison. What do I care about that either? Any part of the Army is a prison."

"You didn't use to think so, Noll."

"How do you know what I thought? I'll admit that, for a long time, I've been trying to shut my eyes. But what's the use. You know the whole situation as well as I do."

"Listen to me, Noll, and perhaps you'll understand how mighty serious your situation is. Don't you understand, fully, that this post and the town of Bantoc have been under martial law since daylight this morning?"

"Well?"

"And you know, Noll, that when a district is under martial law, it's the same thing as in a state of war, as far as the military law goes."

"I suppose so."

"Noll, Noll!" choked the young sergeant of the guard. "Under martial law, or in a state

of war, the punishment for striking an officer ——"

"Great Scott! I had forgotten that!" gasped Noll Terry.

"——is *death!*" finished Hal, almost in a whisper.

CHAPTER VI

THE GUARD-HOUSE TEMPTATION

FOR some minutes thereafter Hal stood speechless, gazing with a look of great compassion at his chum.

Noll, too, was silent.

But Draney was losing not a syllable of the conversation, and his heart was filled with evil joy.

"Oh, well," spoke Noll Terry, at last, his voice sounding hoarse and unnatural, "I'm not going to play the baby, anyway. I'll take the doctor's medicine like a man! I won't beg off."

"I'm afraid there'd be very little chance for you if you tried it," Hal answered. "Noll, I'd give my pay for ten years to come, if that would save you! But it wouldn't."

"Ten years?" repeated Noll, bitterly. "Do you expect to be drawing Army pay for that long?"

"Yes; if nothing happens to me."

"Humph! *I* am glad that I'm never going to draw another cent of Army money," sneered Noll.

"They're calling the sergeant of the guard," announced Private Kelly, from outside.

Hal thrust his right hand between the gratings, grasping the hand of his chum, then turned, stepping out with the air of a broken soldier.

A moment later Kelly was standing before Noll.

"Whisht, lad! I heard what your bunkie was saying to you. And I nearly fell over when he explained to ye that, under martial law, your punishment is to be death. It's true, every word of it. I've been in the Army longer than you, lad, and so I know 'tis true."

"Kelly, you're a real comforter!" retorted Noll ironically.

"And to think," continued the soldier, "that I hold in me hand the key that would unlock the grating that's between you and the world! 'Tis daylight, or I'd use the key, me lad!"

"I believe you would, at that, Kelly," responded Noll gratefully.

"That's not saying, either, that I won't use the key for ye, lad, when the night's well along."

"I believe that, too, Kelly, but what's the use?"

"The use?" echoed Private Kelly. "Lad, are ye wholly tired of the world?"

"But I couldn't sneak off and leave you to face the music!"

"If ye go, I'll be going with ye," proposed Kelly. "I'm sick of the Army, too."

"But, Kelly, where could we go? The soldiers would catch us anywhere."

"There's the hills."

"And there the Moros would get us."

" 'Tis so," assented Kelly thoughtfully. "Lad, ye're opening me eyes, and I see that it's not so easy for a soldier to slip his halter."

"Kelly!" broke in the eager voice of Draney.

"Now, what are you wanting?" demanded Kelly, stepping back and surveying the planter with no great favor.

"You have the keys to both cells," suggested Draney.

" 'Tis wonderful truth you're speaking."

"And you'll have them again, at times, to-night."

"Maybe that's true, also."

"My man," went on the planter, temptingly, "is there no way you can slip us *both* out of here to-night?"

"Now, what would we be wanting of your

company?" demanded the private of the guard speculatively.

"Why, if you two run away you'll be afraid to run to the hills."

"It might not be convenient to do it," admitted Kelly, "seeing that hereafter Terry and myself would not be fighting on the same side with the Thirty-fourth."

"But if the Moros were prime good friends of yours——?"

"What's the use of talking, Mr. Draney, since they're not."

"My man, if you two break away from here, and if you get me away from here with you, the Moros will be the warmest, truest friends you ever had!"

"Is it so now, Joe Draney?" demanded Kelly, cocking his head to one side. "Ye talk like the king in a fairy story."

"Maybe I am more than king among the Moros," retorted the planter with spirit.

"Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't true," retorted the private of the guard incredulously.

"Did you ever hear of the Moros doing me any harm in their uprisings?" demanded the planter.

"Never; so I suppose ye paid the brown men well to leave you alone."

"Paid them to leave me alone?" jeered Dra-

ney. "Why, man, you know about the Datto Hakkut."

"I ought to," returned Kelly, "since I was present at his last morning on earth."

"Hakkut and I had the best of understanding," went on Draney. "I used to find out the lay of the land for the Datto Hakkut, and help him all I could, and he used to turn over to me thirty per cent. of all the money he forced the planters to pay him for protection."

"It must have been a fine bit of graft," muttered Kelly enviously.

"It netted me two or three comfortable fortunes," admitted Draney coolly.

"And now ye're by way of losing all that trade!"

"That depends a good bit upon you, my man," returned the planter, eying the soldier meaningly.

"You're thinking of the key I have in my pocket—that's it, eh?" questioned Kelly.

"And of your services in guiding me away from this military post after you've let me out of this cell," Draney reminded him.

"But what'll we be doing, the Sarge and I, after you get us out among the Moros?" Kelly inquired.

"Why, if you've a taste for fighting, you can lead some of our brown-skinned men, and

you'll have a chance to try sharpshooting against some of the officers you don't like. If you serve as officers for the Moros I can promise you both handsome money out of it each year. You and the sergeant in the next cell, condemned to death for speaking his mind like a man, are both experts in the way American soldiers fight. You can be Moro chiefs, instead, and make money enough so that, one of these days, you can take ship for Hong Kong. After you reach that port, with your fortunes in your pockets, the whole world is open to you. And you'll have money to spend when you find your own world again."

Kelly deliberated for some moments.

"I think I'll not go into it," he announced, at last.

"Man, you're an idiot!" cried Draney, losing his temper. "Why won't you go into it?"

"It's the kind of a job that'd make a man feel as though he ought to have a halter around his neck, whether he gets one there or not."

"Then how are you going to save your friend in the next cell?"

"Whist!" retorted Kelly. " 'Tis a bad sort of dream stuff we're talking. Wait till I see who's about."

Private Kelly strolled slowly to the door of the guard house, stepped outside presently, and

looked about him in a casual way. Then he came back, halting between the two cells.

"Not a word have you said, Sarge," Kelly reminded Noll Terry. "Yet you've heard the whole dicker. What do you say to what Mister Draney has been offering?"

"I don't like the sound of it," Noll replied moodily.

"And why not, Sarge?"

"Because I don't like the idea, even to save my life, of playing traitor against the people of the United States."

"But see here, Terry," broke in Draney's cautious voice, "the people of the United States don't care about this thing one way or another. Why, it'll never even be heard of in the United States. You'll be doing this trick solely and simply against the officers that you don't like. You'll be able to make them smart many's the time, simply by the way you'll know how to lead the Moro warriors against them."

"There's something in that," Noll Terry admitted. "Yet, before I go into this thing, I want to know who the Moro leader is nowadays."

"Well, I guess I am, more than any one," replied Draney with a low laugh.

"Do you lead the Moros in the field?" asked Noll doubtingly.

"Oh, no; there are four lesser dattos who lead, or will lead, the Moros as soon as the next trouble starts."

"How soon will that be?" insisted Noll.

"Within a very short time. As soon as I have the plans mapped out for the dattos."

"Who are the dattos?" was Noll's next question.

"Why are you asking me so much?"

"Because, Mr. Draney, unless I am satisfied that you are being wholly frank with me, I won't go into your scheme, even to save my life from the court-martial."

"Well," replied Draney slowly, "Hekka, Moddo and Trekim are the dattos now in the hills."

"That's only three," Noll reminded him.

"Confound you, you insistent beggar!" growled Joe Draney, behind his teeth. But aloud he added:

"You know Kulva, the Moro planter on the further side of Bantoc?"

"Yes."

"He's our fourth datto, ready to make trouble for the military right here on the spot."

"The arms that were seized were intended for Datto Kulva?"

"Yes," admitted Draney.

"He's a dead dog, then. The military have

his guns; they were the ones that were seized last night."

"Kulva has other weapons, though. He has three hundred rifles and seventy thousand rounds of ammunition buried in the cellar under his house."

"Are you sure of that?" Noll asked quickly.

"Of course I'm sure!" retorted Draney impatiently. "I'm the secret head of this whole Moro scheme to work money out of timid planters."

"Then, if we escape, could we go to Kulva, and would his man stick by us in our escape to the hills? How long would it take Kulva to get his fighting men together?"

"A bare hour."

"That might be too long," replied Noll thoughtfully.

"But you're really thinking of going with me?" insisted Joe Draney artfully.

"Hang you, man, don't tempt me!" growled Noll, in sudden passion. "Any prospect of life and freedom is enough to tempt a man who finds himself in a cell, facing trial and the death sentence. But don't talk any more about your infernal scheme. I don't want to betray my country."

"But it isn't your country that you're going to fight. It's these officers here."

Draney talked on, artfully, in a low voice. Kelly strolled toward the door of the guard house, that he might give the signal in case any one came too near.

For an hour Draney argued. Noll gradually weakened, for in all human beings the love of life is strong.

The conversation was broken off, at last, by Kelly's low-hissed signal and the sound of steps outside. Lieutenant Holmes came in, attended by the young sergeant of the guard. Hal and the officer went out together after two or three minutes.

"Kelly!" called Noll, after the sound of steps had died away.

Private Kelly stepped over quickly.

"What do you think, Kelly, of this wild scheme?" asked Terry feverishly.

"Truth to tell, not much," replied Kelly reluctantly. "But, Sarge, me lad, when Kelly's a friend, then Kelly's a friend. I think too much of ye, lad, to see you die like a rat in a trap."

"You're in for this scheme, then?" prodded Noll.

"You know just how much I think of it, Sarge. But, as I said, when it's the life of a friend——"

"Speak up, Kelly!" commanded Noll. "I'm

in torment. Don't dodge around the bush in this fashion."

"Then, lad, I'm saying I'll go with this man, Draney, if you do."

"But do you think I ought to go?"

"Why should ye stay?" demanded Kelly cynically. "To whom do ye owe the most duty? To yourself, or to the officers that put ye here?"

"That's the talk!" broke in Draney eagerly. "And Kelly's remark sizes up the situation."

"But, Kelly, if we do this thing, do you think the time will ever come when we'll feel heartsick and ashamed?"

"I won't," promised the private. "I always look ahead—never behind on the way I've come."

"Oh, but I'm tempted!" groaned Noll.

Draney held his peace, but in his eyes a look of evil joy shone.

"Kelly," begged Noll, "you think we can stand it—afterwards?"

"If we don't, ye'll soon have a berth under the sod," replied Private Kelly dryly.

"All right, then," agreed Noll, his voice shaking. "Draney!"

"Yes, lad?"

"We accept your offer!" muttered Noll in an awe-struck voice.

From Noll's cell there came a muffled sound.

"What's that, Kelly?" asked Joseph Draney.

"The poor lad's gone in a heap to the floor. But never ye fear, sir; he's the lad with the grit, and he'll soon come around and be ready for—*anything!*"

CHAPTER VII

PRIVATE KELLY HAS A GRUDGE

IT had grown late in the evening.

Careless, happy-go-lucky Private Kelly showed not a trace of worry in his face, nor nervousness in his manner. If anything, his look was a trifle stern.

Joseph Draney, secure in his knowledge that he was soon to be free, ate supper as heartily as he had done in the case of the other meals of the day. Noll, too, seemed to possess an excellent appetite.

The members of the guard who were not on post had, by Sergeant Overton's permission, taken their cots out into the open air just beyond the door, and there they slept soundly.

Sergeant Hal was still up and about. From time to time Draney eyed this young sergeant

keenly, wondering whether the youthful soldier ever intended to turn in; or whether he would stay up all night and foil the escape.

At last, however, Hal stepped outside. This gave Kelly a chance to whisper:

"Never ye fear, Mr. Draney. The sergeant-boy will be called away when all is ready for us to throw our little trick."

"What are you waiting for? It must be near midnight," replied Draney in an impatient whisper.

"Never fear, sir; I know the ways of the garrison. We won't start soon enough to make a fuddle of it."

Now the corporal of the guard turned up, routing out the members of the new relief. Draney heard them being formed, heard them answering to the names, and next was conscious that the corporal was making a brief inspection of the men.

"Men, you know your old instructions; there are no new ones," said the corporal. "Twos right, march?"

Away marched the new guard; then, after a while, the corporal marched the old relief back, dismissed them, and the men sought their cots in the open.

"All well, Corporal?" inquired Sergeant Hal, outside.

"All well, Sergeant."

Hal lingered, just outside the door.

"Confound the young military rat!" muttered Draney irefully. "Is he never going to go away and give us our chance?"

"Corporal of the guard, post number three!" rang the call. The corporal started. Soon the word came:

"Sergeant of the guard, post number three!"

Hal waited only a bare instant to snatch up his rifle, then vanished. Kelly, who, apparently, had been half-dozing in a chair inside the guard house, sprang to his feet, soft-footed as a cat. Crossing the room he thrust the key into the door of Noll's cell. Another key he fitted into the cell door in front of Draney.

Click-click! He gave them both a turn.

"Follow me, now—still as mice, the both of ye," whispered Kelly. "Keep behind me till we're clear of the post altogether. If we're hailed don't answer—let me do it."

No need to caution Draney. He fell in behind Noll, who, in turn, was behind Kelly. From under his coat, in the dim light, the private of the guard drew two revolvers and passed them back.

"Put those irons out of sight," whispered

Kelly. "Don't use 'em unless ye have to save your lives!"

Now he led the pair of fugitives past the cells to a narrow passageway that led to a rear door.

"Wait," whispered Kelly. "Let me look outside."

He opened the door a crack, then nodded.

"Come on," he whispered. "Walk fast but quiet!"

Noll Terry opened the door only enough to permit him to squeeze outside.

Joe Draney, being more portly, threw the door open. He stepped out quickly.

A group of figures stood before them.

"Good evening, Mr. Draney!"

It was the mocking voice of Captain Cortland, and the other officers of the garrison were with him. Behind the officers stood a dozen enlisted men, while back of them lay C Company in its dog-tents.

"Treachery!" howled the planter, falling back and turning ghastly white.

"It all depends on how you define the word," replied the post commander, dryly.

Draney's despairing backward glance had taken in the figures of four or five soldiers regarding him from the doorway through which he had just passed.

There was no escape, but Draney, driven into

a corner, could prove himself a game man. Like a flash he drew out the revolver that Kelly had passed him.

"Click! click! click! sounded the hammer of the revolver, as Draney held its muzzle on the post commander. Then, with an ugly exclamation Draney threw the empty weapon from him.

"Tricked all around!" he howled. "But, Terry, you're in this as badly as I am."

"Not quite," corrected Captain Cortland. "Sergeant Terry acted under orders, and did his work in so neat a fashion that his conduct is sure to bring him deserved commendation from department headquarters. Sergeant Terry, take charge of your prisoner and bring him over to my office.

Sergeant Noll nodded to two soldiers of the guard, who placed themselves on either side of the hulking planter's now shrinking figure. His mind still in a daze Draney was marched over to the little administration building and ushered inside. Captain Cortland took his seat at the desk, the other officers finding seats, while Sergeants Hal and Noll, with the two soldiers of the guard, remained standing and watching Draney most alertly.

"Now, Draney," observed Captain Cortland impressively, "I guess it's about all up with you."

"I realize," raged the planter, "that I have been made the butt of some silly trick. I am afraid I do not, as yet, quite realize what you all seem so jubilant about."

"You don't?" inquired the post commander, mockingly. "Then, Draney, I suppose it can do no harm to tell you a few things. In the first place, the offense of which you stood charged, while serious enough, would not enable the authorities to keep you locked up as long as you should be. We did not possess legal proof, although we very well knew, that you had been the aider, abettor and partner of the late Datto Hakkut. As I have said, we knew that to be the fact, but we were not prepared to prove it."

"And how are you going to prove it now?" sneered the planter. "Have Sergeant Terry and that fellow, Kelly, been cooking up something to tell you that I said to them? If so, they're a pair of liars, and their word won't go far in the courts. I'll give the government a big fight over the admission of any such evidence from liars!"

"I think I'd better tell you a few things, Draney," Captain Cortland went on quietly. "Last night we discussed your case in this room. While we knew that we had sufficient evidence to convict you of aiding a shipment of arms and ammunition into this island, we realized that

our information did not go far enough to connect you with past Moro uprisings in this island. I will place the credit where credit is due. Sergeants Overton and Terry laid before me a plan by which they believed you could be caught. Draney, you remember the scene you saw and heard before the guard-house door? That was a part of the plan. Sergeant Terry, at his own suggestion, was authorized to have words with Lieutenant Holmes, the officer of the day. It was also part of the plan that Sergeant Terry should be locked up after knocking down his superior officer. Private Kelly was also in the plan. When you found that these two men could aid you in your escape, you, in order to impress them with your power and with the chance you could give them to escape, told them all about your connection with the former Datto Hakkut, and also of your connection with the Moro uprising that is now in the bud."

"These two soldiers will tell you that I said a lot of such fool things," sneered Draney, turning first white and then greenish.

"Draney, the officers of this garrison were all standing in the passageway of the guard house, and heard every word that you uttered. Moreover—Sergeant Dinsmore!"

At the given summons Dinsmore entered the

room, carrying a note-book under his arm.

"Before enlisting Sergeant Dinsmore was employed as a stenographer," resumed Captain Cortland. "At the time when we officers overheard your conversation Sergeant Dinsmore was seated at a table before us. He took down every word of the conversation, Draney, between yourself, Sergeant Terry and Private Kelly. To-morrow Sergeant Dinsmore will transcribe all his notes on the typewriter. Then the officers of this post will sign his report as witnesses under oath."

Draney was choking with rage. But at last he managed to cry hoarsely:

"That conversation was all false as far as I was concerned. I made up that stuff as a fairy tale, in order to induce Terry and Kelly to aid me in escaping."

"Why did you wish to escape, if you were an innocent man?" demanded Captain Cortland coldly. "However, we shall be prepared to prove at your trial that the story you told was genuine. We have already verified it at one point. Corporal Hyman, bring in the prisoner."

There was a sound of steps at the door. Then Hyman pushed into the room before him a middle-aged Moro whose eyes were blazing. The fellow was sullen and obstinate.

"You know this Moro gentleman, Draney?" asked Captain Cortland coolly.

"I never saw him before!" quivered the planter.

"What's the use of lying, Draney? This man is the Datto Kulva. I admit that we did not know, before, that the native Moros looked up to Kulva as a datto. However, Draney, on the information that you gave, I despatched a column at quick time to go out to Kulva's. There we found, buried under Kulva's house, as you had stated, the rifles and ammunition."

Draney went ghastly white as he realized the significance of this point against him.

Kulva, in that instant, broke away from Hyman and sprang at the planter.

"So you told the soldiers? You sold me to the *Americanos,* you big, red-faced sneak?" howled Kulva. "You—*you?*"

In his blind rage Kulva sprang at Draney, trying to tear the planter to bits with his hands. But Hal Overton thrust out a foot, tripping the Moro, and Noll fell on top of him, pinning the brown man.

"You have sold me!" howled Kulva. "It is well. I shall tell the *Americanos* all I know about you."

"Silence the prisoner and remove him," commanded Captain Cortland.

For a moment after Kulva had been removed there was deep stillness in the room. Joseph Draney felt his head swimming, and feared that he was about to fall.

"You can judge, Draney, whether the government is going to have a sufficiently good case against you," remarked the post commander. "Kulva, until the trial comes off, will not be confined near you. You will have no chance to talk with him. I thought it only fair to you, Draney, to let you realize how complete the case against you is. If you have nothing further to say I will send you back to the guard house. You may well banish all hopes of escape."

"May I ask your pardon, sir, for this interruption?" called Private Kelly, taking four steps into the room, halting and bringing up his hand in salute.

"Speak, Kelly, if you have anything to say," replied Captain Cortland.

"Sir," proceeded the soldier, "I have the honor to ask your leave that I hit this fellow once, good and hard, before he's taken away."

"What do you want to do that for, my man?" asked the post commander, in astonishment.

"Just by way, sir, of my answer to the cheek of Draney in imagining that any man with a right to bear the name of

Kelly could be paid to sell his flag, sir!"

Captain Cortland had hard work to preserve his gravity. Some of the officers did laugh sympathetically, but the post commander replied solemnly:

"Your request, Private Kelly, is rather a reasonable one. I would be glad to grant it if it were not for the very strict regulation against abusing or maltreating prisoners. It is with the greatest regret, I assure you, Private Kelly, that I feel compelled to order you to do nothing of the sort. Sergeant Overton, return the prisoner to his cell in the guard house, and take every precaution to see that he does not escape. Lieutenant Holmes, my order applies with equal force to yourself."

At a sign from Hal the two soldiers of the guard who had brought Draney hither now started their man from the room.

Draney halted defiantly, however, when he found himself face to face with Hal, Noll and Kelly.

"To you three," cried the planter, in a voice that quivered with passion, "I can promise my hate forever! I have a longer arm and greater power than you may believe. You shall feel the weight of that power before much time has passed over your heads!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE BROWN MEN ARE HEARD FROM

FOR days and days after that Bantoc seemed a sleepier town than ever.

Captain Cortland had expected a prompt outbreak on the part of the disaffected Moros after the captures of Draney and the Datto Kulva, together with the seizure of the two big lots of the implements of war.

The reason for this really was that the seizure of so many hundreds of stands of arms had crippled the Moros interested in the plotted uprising. They were without sufficient fighting tools here in the northern Misamis district.

These Moros of Mindanao, like practically all other Oriental peoples, are most friendly in all their words and acts, until the time comes when they actually take up their weapons to fight.

In the meantime Joseph Draney sulked in his cell in the guard house. The post commander was obliged to keep him there until either an Army transport or a naval vessel bound for Manila put in at Bantoc.

Kulva had vanished. Of course Captain Cortland had this datto under arrest, but the

whereabouts of Kulva was a mystery to all white men except the post commander and his few officers.

In the small hours after midnight, one night, the alarm came suddenly. The sentry on number four post was the first to observe colored rockets in the sky well to the south of the post. The sentry passed the word for the officer of the day, who chanced to be Lieutenant Ray.

"Those are Seaforth's signals," remarked Ray quickly. "He is using the rocket code with which we supplied him after the last attack. Now he is being attacked again."

With that, Lieutenant Ray ran to the quarters of Captain Cortland. Just twelve minutes later Lieutenant Dick Prescott, at the head of a column of thirty infantrymen, moved at quick time.

After that all was quiet until six in the morning when a Moro, breathless from running, arrived at the post. He bore a letter to Captain Cortland, and was at once admitted with it. The post commander read hurriedly, then called:

"Orderly, pass the word for Sergeant Overton to report here on the jump."

Hal reported in swift time, buttoning his blouse as he ran across the parade ground.

"Sergeant Overton, I have here a letter

from Henderson, brought in by this Moro, for whom Henderson vouches as a loyal and honest man. Henderson's plantation has been attacked—by a small force of Moros he believes. He asks for troops with all despatch. Take twenty men, with two days' rations and a hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition, and push over to Henderson's as rapidly as you can without using up your men. This Moro will guide you. Henderson's is on the same road with Kulva's place, but two miles beyond."

"Very good, sir."

"Sergeant, you will fight any bandits that you find attacking Henderson's place. You will pursue, if you can do so to good advantage, but you will be careful to avoid letting the enemy draw you too far into the country or up into the hills."

"Yes, sir."

"And of course, Sergeant, you will bear in mind the need of using care in your distinctions between Moros and Moros. There are many fine men among the Moros. Not by any means all of them are hostile to us. You will use extreme care not to visit any hardship or indignity upon Moros who appear to be loyal to the American government and acting in good faith."

"Yes, sir."

"Get your men in readiness, and I will come out to the parade ground to give you any further instructions that may occur to me."

"Yes, sir. I have one favor that I would like to ask, if I may, sir."

"To take Sergeant Terry with you?" smiled the post commander.

"Yes, sir."

"I would like to give my consent, Sergeant Overton, but I feel that I cannot. We have very few officers here, and there may be need for every one of them and more. During the night Seaforth signaled in that he was being attacked, and I sent Lieutenant Prescott and thirty men in that direction. What I am giving you, Sergeant, is really an officer's mission, and I must save Sergeant Terry for just such another mission if the need arrives. We have kept the Moros so short of arms this time that I believe they will attack in small parties over a wide area."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?"

"Proceed, Sergeant Overton."

"It has just struck me, sir, that the Moros may make several such small-party attacks, in order to draw away as much of the military as possible. These attacks on planters may be only ruses. Then, if they can succeed in getting enough soldiers despatched from here they

may then attempt to attack the post in force, with a view to rescuing Draney."

"Your wits are working, Sergeant," smiled the captain. "I have already thought of that, and I shall take good care not to let too many of my men be drawn away from here. However, if the Moros knew me better they would not attack this post with any thought of saving the Draney fellow. I would order him shot, without an instant's hesitation, if I found the Moros attacking in overwhelming force. Now, hasten, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, by the way, you may take Corporal Hyman with you. If anything befell you, Sergeant, he would be a good second-in-command."

"Thank you, sir."

Once more saluting, Sergeant Hal turned and was out of the door, across the parade ground and into barracks at a speed that showed how truly this youth loved soldiering.

"He's really as valuable as a lieutenant," mused Captain Cortland. "I certainly hope that this valuable young soldier will be an officer one of these near days. Such alert youngsters from the ranks are as useful to the service as the graduates from West Point."

In a wonderfully short space of time the

boyish sergeant had his men tumbling out of barracks in the race for the parade ground. But Hal, not by any means breathless, was first to arrive.

"Fall in!" he called sharply.

The inspection of the men, their arms and equipment was a hurried yet thorough affair. Captain Cortland came out in time to watch from a distance of a few yards.

"All in readiness, sir," reported Sergeant Hal, stepping over and saluting. "Any further orders, sir?"

"None. March your detachment, Sergeant."

"Twos right, march!" ordered Hal, in a voice of quiet energy. "Take the right of the line, Corporal."

Hal marched along at the side of his detachment, keeping the Moro messenger, Joko by name, at his side.

It was a rapid march. There was no halt while passing through Bantoc. The detachment had covered four miles at brisk step before the young commander gave the order for a halt. Even then he allowed only five minutes.

"We may be sure that we're being watched from the brush," Hal confided to Corporal Hyman. "Already Moro scouts have seen us, counted our strength, and they are on their

way to carry the tidings to the leader of the bandits at Henderson's."

"What we need in this district," muttered Hyman, "are automobile trucks big enough to carry a detachment of this size, and able to go thirty miles an hour."

"The Army of any other country would have automobiles under such conditions," admitted Hal.

"I know," grunted Hyman. "But the American Army has to travel on its feet. Not because our country lacks either patriots or good business men. We've the best of the world in each line. But Congress has to be stirred by the people, and the people hardly know that they own an Army."

"Fall in!" ordered Hal, returning his watch to his pocket.

In another moment the little column was on its way again. Kulva's place was passed, and by this time the marching men could hear the occasional popping of rifles ahead.

"Save some of that for me," sang a soldier.

"Silence in the ranks," commanded Hal, grinning. The American soldier loves fighting —not for the sake of fighting, but as a sporting proposition in which the American must prove himself a little swifter and a little keener

than the fighting men of any other nation.

By the time three-quarters of a mile more had been covered all sound of firing had ceased. For some minutes after that the khaki-clad men trudged along, but no further sound of fighting was heard.

"I guess it's a good deal as I suspected, Hyman," confided Hal. "The Moros have probably heard that we're coming and they've fled. Their only idea is to attack at several points in order to draw the troops away from the post. But we'll not take too big chances of being ambushed. Take the first two files, Corporal, and move them ahead at a trot until I call to you to halt."

Hyman obeyed immediately. With this point in advance Sergeant Hal felt that he had taken all the precaution possible with such a small command as his.

His first guess, however, proved the correct one. As the marching troops came in sight of Mr. Henderson's buildings there was no sign of war in a nutshell here.

However, Hal kept his point still in advance. As Hyman wheeled his four men and turned up the roadway to the planter's house the late defenders came out.

They numbered three white men and four Moros in all. Henderson was a clean-cut, well-

built man of thirty-five. He came, rifle in hand, at the head of his little force.

"Welcome to our little city, General!" called the planter gayly, striding out to meet Hyman.

"I'm only a corporal so far, sir, but I hope to have my general's star next week," Hyman called back. "Point halt. Break ranks."

Then up came Sergeant Hal, with the remainder of the detachment. He gave the order to break ranks and stepped over to Mr. Henderson to hear an account of the attack.

CHAPTER IX

DISASTER IN THE TALL GRASS

"THE rascals must have been informed that you were coming," explained Mr. Henderson. "They stopped firing on the house several minutes ago."

"How many of the Moros were there, sir?" Hal inquired.

"Impossible to say, as they fired altogether from cover, and attempted no rushes. I do not imagine there were more than thirty of them, though. I am glad to see that Joko got through safely to you."

The Moro messenger and guide grinned broadly.

"Joko has been with me five years," continued the planter. "He wouldn't join the bandits if they offered to make him a datto."

"Me good Moro; no thief, no kill," asserted Joko proudly.

"I have no difficulty in keeping faithful natives with me," explained Mr. Henderson. "They won't all fight for me, though. Some of my men took to the bush when the attack started. A good many of the loyal Moros are afraid of the vengeance of their fellows if they fight for the Americans."

"My belief," said Hal, "is that your late assailants, Mr. Henderson, have decamped. I don't believe they intended a really serious attack. However, I'm going to find out if any of them are hanging about. Corporal Hyman, take eight men and scour all the woods hereabouts. If we hear a sound of your running into any trouble we'll hurry to your support."

"It's tough on shoe leather," grinned Hyman, "but I don't believe my skin will get any holes in it to-day."

Then he marched off with his eight men and they soon vanished into the woods.

"Won't you come and look about the house, Sergeant?" invited Mr. Henderson. "You'll find a good many things here that one doesn't often find in these far-away plantations."

"Thank you, sir; I'd enjoy it," the young sergeant answered, "but it wouldn't do for me to forget that I have a scouting party out, and that I must be prepared to go to the relief of that squad if it is attacked."

"There's mighty little danger of that now, I guess," smiled Mr. Henderson. "The coming of the troops has scared the scoundrels away."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Henderson, it would be a poor military commander who allowed himself to feel secure merely because the air was still and no enemies stalked in plain sight."

"I should have known better than to ask you," laughed Henderson. "If there's one thing that is the same with all officers of the regulars it's their unending devotion to duty."

"I'm not an officer yet; only a non-commissioned officer."

"You're young yet, Sergeant," replied Henderson shrewdly. "You have plenty of time ahead of you in which to become an officer."

Hal nodded pleasantly, then started to walk slowly around the house. Across the hollow of his left arm he carried his rifle. His purpose was to note the lay of the land surrounding the planter's house, and also to keep his eyes open for any possible sign of hostile activity.

But he saw nothing of importance. Neither

did he hear anything. It was nearly four hours later when Corporal Hyman marched back his squad of eight men.

"We've covered miles through the woods around here, Sergeant, and we didn't even scare up a bird big enough to eat," was Hyman's characteristic report.

"I think the Moros have taken wings and flown away, Mr. Henderson," announced Hal.

"What's puzzling me," said the planter, "is why the fellows attacked here at all, when they weren't strong enough to make even a ten minutes' stand against a handful of soldiers."

"That does seem puzzling," Hal Overton admitted. He didn't take the trouble to explain, however, that he had his own view of the puzzle, and that his view was held also by Captain Cortland.

"Are you and your men going to remain out here to-night?" inquired Mr. Henderson.

"I hardly think so, sir, unless something new develops within the next two hours."

"Then the rascals will come back to-night," sighed the planter.

"Very possibly," assented Hal.

"And we shall have to stand 'em off again, unaided. Joko will again have to risk his life trying to get by the attacking bandits."

"That isn't going to be necessary, Mr. Hen-

derson. If you are again attacked you can signal us, and we shall know within sixty seconds or so after the first hostile shot is fired here."

"How? Do you imagine my place is equipped with wireless telegraphy?" demanded the planter.

"No, sir; though I could wish it were. But I'll show you. Private Slosson, bring that bundle here."

Slosson arose from the ground and brought a bundle that he had carried on the way out.

"Have you a note-book and pencil about you, sir?" asked the boyish sergeant.

"Certainly," replied the planter, producing the articles.

"Then be good enough to write this down: 'Two red, one orange, one green.' You will find the rockets labeled as to their color. Send them up in the order and in the colors that I have given you, and the sentry on one of the posts at Fort Benjamin Franklin will see the signals and will call the corporal of the guard, who will immediately notify the commanding officer that Mr. Henderson's house is being attacked by Moros."

"And you will send up answering signals at the fort?"

"No, sir; for that would come too near being a signal from us to the Moros. But you may be

sure that, within a few minutes after your signals have been seen at the post a body of soldiers will be on their way out here. I must ask you, though, Mr. Henderson, to be careful not to send up signals needlessly. Don't signal us until you are positively sure that you are being attacked."

"I'm not a man to be scared by shadows," replied the planter with some dignity.

"I am almost certain, Mr. Henderson, that you won't be attacked."

"Will you tell me why you think so?"

"I don't know that I'm at liberty to do that, sir. But I believe that the last Moro visit to you was a demonstration, rather than a real attack."

"Dinner is ready for the soldiers," announced the plantation superintendent, appearing in the doorway of the house.

"Corporal Hyman, march half of the men inside and let them eat," directed Hal. "When you are through, and come out, I will take the other half in. It wouldn't be well to allow ourselves all to be caught at table."

"Then you still suspect that the enemy may be about," observed Mr. Henderson shrewdly.

"You're wrong there, sir. I don't suspect. In fact, I don't even believe there are any hostile Moros near. It is merely precaution to

keep part of the force outside on guard."

"I wish I had you with me all the time, Sergeant," sighed the planter. "I'd feel a lot safer, for I don't believe you would ever allow yourself to be caught napping."

"The soldier who is caught napping in a time of hostilities is hardly worthy of the name of soldier," Hal answered.

After a while Hyman and his men came out. Hal then went inside with those of the men who had not yet eaten. After the second half of the men had eaten Hal allowed the men a little time to rest. Then he went to their host and took leave of him.

"Going?" inquired the planter, in a tone of unmistakable regret.

"Yes, sir; but any time you really need us you can get us quickly enough, for the Moros seldom attack in the day time."

"I hope the commanding officer will send you, Sergeant," cried the planter, with ready admiration.

"Thank you, sir. Fall in, men. Corporal Hyman, make a quick inspection."

Very soon after Corporal Hyman reported:

"All present, sir, and all arms and equipments in order."

"March the detachment, Corporal."

The little column moved away. Hal, after a

parting handshake with the white men of the plantation, hastened after his men.

"Do you want a point ahead, Sergeant?" inquired Hyman.

"Yes; until we're in sight of Bantoc. Take the first two files, Corporal."

This was done, and the point, a hundred and fifty yards in advance, was maintained until the detachment was within a mile of Bantoc. Then Hal Overton recalled the little advance guard, feeling that all danger of an ambush was past.

"It looks to me, Sergeant," confided Hyman, as the two non-commissioned officers stepped along at the head of the line, "that the Moros are going to make use of the trick that Aguinaldo's Tagalos used to play on the Army years ago up on Luzon."

"What was that, Hyman?"

"Why, the Tagalos used to start all sorts of false alarms, just to keep our soldiers on the hike day and night. Then, by and by, when Uncle Sam's men were all worn out, the Tagalos would attack in earnest. I'll make the guess, right now, that the Moros keep us running day and night for some time to come."

"What if they do?" asked Hal. "Captain Cortland won't send out much more than half of his men at any one time. The men, back at

the post, can sleep and rest up while others are out on the hike. Our men won't get anything worse than healthful exercise."

"Maybe," grunted Hyman. "But too many men in the Army make the mistake of thinking that these little brown natives are fools. My belief is that there are a good many military geniuses among these brown people. If the Moros stood together better we'd have to keep an Army corps or two right here on Mindanao, to say nothing of the rest of the Philippine Islands."

"No people hold together," returned Hal, "when they're once convinced that they can fight nothing but losing battles. It isn't human nature to stand up to a lifetime of thrashings."

While Hal was speaking he thought he detected a movement in the tall grass under the trees off at the right of the road. He wasn't sure, and, in any case, the matter did not seem to him to be important enough to warrant halting the detachment. He could investigate himself and still keep his men in sight.

"Keep on with the detachment, Corporal," he directed. "I'm going to bag a Moro scout over there to the right. I'll have you in sight all the time."

Hyman nodded, no more concerned than his young superior had been. Hal, with his rifle

thrown across his left arm, left the road, stepping into the beginning of the tall grass. There was no more motion there; in fact it might have been caused by a passing breeze. Sergeant Overton fully expected to be back with the detachment in another minute or so.

Then, suddenly, through the tall grass Sergeant Hal caught sight of a half-crouching brown man working toward him. In a twinkling Overton sprang three feet or so in the other direction, intending to raise his rifle and be ready to club the brown man.

But instead of landing on solid ground at first, the young sergeant shot down a steep incline.

Two Moros waited there to receive him. Both piled upon him, while one of them, throttling Hal, hissed in his ear the one sharp word:

"Draney!"

CHAPTER X

MOKKA'S IMPOSSIBLE PLAN

SERGEANT HAL fought with all his might to throw off that strangling hold. But four or five other natives had piled upon him, and by sheer force of weight and numbers they held him.

His face purpled, then turned blackish under that horrible pressure at his throat. His head whirled; his mind began to desert him.

While he lay thus, gasping and panting for air, a deft brown hand forced a wad of hemp fiber between his teeth. This was quickly bound in place.

Then the assailant at his throat released the awful pressure. Hal Overton drew in a breath of the air that had suddenly become so precious. His mind and his strength rapidly returned, even though such air as he got came through his nostrils or was filtered through hempen fiber.

Now two of the captors picked him up bodily. Though they were not large men they were accustomed to labor and were muscular. The pair carried him with ease while a third glanced greedily at the

young sergeant's rifle as he picked it up.

"Let them enjoy themselves," passed rapidly through the Army boy's mind. "They won't have me long. Corporal Hyman is too good a soldier to lose me as easily as this."

The speed at which the Moros traveled was surprising. They were men used to the forest and the trail, and they covered ground at a rate that made the young sergeant understand, better than ever before, why fleeing Moros usually seemed to melt before pursuing military, who were forced to go at a slower rate on account of the pack that each soldier carries.

"Where have I seen before the rascal that grabbed me by the throat?" pondered the young sergeant, as he was carried along through the forest. "Oh, yes; now I place him. He's the little brown fellow that serves Draney—or *did* serve him—as a body-servant. Whew, but I reckon I'm in for it!"

Every few minutes the men changed their burden, a new pair carrying the young sergeant. Always, except for an instant's halt at such times of shifting, the little brown men kept along at an easy trot. As nearly as the Army boy could judge his captors were covering ground at the rate of more than four miles an hour. There appeared to be some ten Moros in this party of grimly gleeful captors.

"I'm not so sure that Hyman will be able to overtake these scoundrels in time to aid me much," thought Hal, his heart sinking.

At last they stopped, in the depths of the forest. The leader of this brown-skinned crew immediately spoke in the native dialect to four of his rifle-armed followers. They saluted, then vanished into the jungle.

From the way they set out Hal imagined that these men were sent to guard against possible surprise by the American troops.

Hal's wrists had been bound behind him, but his feet were still free. During his rapid passage through the forest he had not attempted to kick out with his feet, for he was sensible, and knew that such antics would only result in his being badly treated.

Now the last pair of burden carriers halted and stood Hal Overton under a broadly spreading tree.

"You know me?" demanded the Moro who had first strangled Hal.

"Oh, yes," drawled Hal, as soon as the fellow had deftly slipped the gag from his mouth.

"Who am I?"

"Your mother nicknamed you Mokka."

"Yes; you are right. You know me. Who is my master?"

"Your master *was* Draney."

"Why 'was'?"

"Because he will never be loose again," retorted Hal. "You can't serve him any more."

"But you are very much wrong!" cried Mokka, grinning.

"Why wrong?" demanded Hal.

"Because Master Draney soon be free."

"No, he won't! Don't fool yourself with any such notions as that."

"Your general will hear that we have you. That we kill you unless Master Draney be made at once free."

"Oh, that's your game, is it?" demanded Sergeant Overton.

"Yes; good game."

"It's a worthless game," retorted Hal shortly.

"Why?"

"Because our captain—he isn't a general—won't make the trade."

"But he will," insisted Mokka, "when he knows that else you die."

"You're building on a poor foundation, Mokka. Captain Cortland won't make the trade. He won't swap Draney for me."

"Oh, we see," grinned the Moro confidently.

"But he can't do it, you see," Hal took trouble to explain. "The American law doesn't

allow him to turn a prisoner loose in order to get one of his own men back."

"He have to do it," cried Mokka fiercely.

"But he can't. Mokka, can't you get it through your stupid brown head that a captain in the American Army can't make laws to suit himself? He has to obey the law as it stands. And Captain Cortland simply can't release any prisoner who stands accused of treasonable crimes."

Mokka's jaw dropped. He was devoted to his scoundrel master, Draney. The Moro would have gone through fire and water to serve the wretched white man in any way.

But the law? "Law" is a word that all the semi-civilized members of the Filipino races have been made to understand. Americans have taught them American law is unchangeable in the Philippine Islands, and that no exceptions can be made for any, white or brown.

"You tell me the truth about the law?" demanded Mokka, his voice quivering.

"Yes; I've told you the truth."

"And Master Draney can't be made free?"

"He can't."

"Not even to save your life?"

"Not even to save the life of a *general* in the Army," Sergeant Hal responded.

Mokka appeared overcome with grief. As

soon as he could control himself the brown man turned to his comrades, who had been looking stolidly on. He spoke to them in their tongue. Each of the Moros started and looked dismayed. From studying their faces Hal was able to judge how important a leader Joseph Draney had been to these lawless Moros.

Then ensued a great jabbering in Moro. Hal, in his months of service at Bantoc had picked up many words in the Moro dialect. But now these men spoke rapidly, mumbling their words at the same time.

"I can't make out what they're saying," Hal muttered to himself. "It would take an expert in Moro jabber to make anything out of their palaver."

He was not, however, to be left long without an interpreter. Mokka turned to the Army boy with a lowering look.

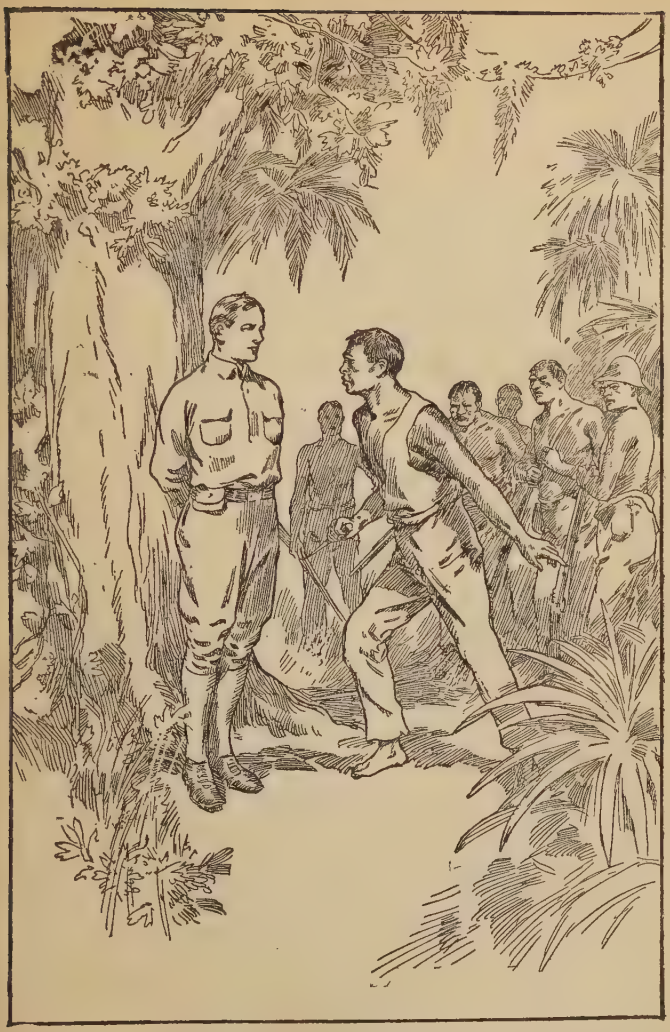
"My men they say you must know American law."

"I do," Hal nodded.

"And that you would not fool us, when you must pay for Draney yourself if he is not set free."

"I have not been fooling you. No American officer has the power to set free a man arrested for crimes."

"Then my men say we kill you, and send



"Go Ahead When You're Ready."

your head to your general—no, captain—as a sign that we get captain's head, too, as soon as we can. We get all soldiers' heads we can, no matter how long it take us."

"Those of you who start in to enjoy yourselves in that manner will run up against ropes much sooner than you imagine," warned Hal Overton grimly.

"Maybe; maybe. We all have to die some time."

"That's so," assented the boyish sergeant cheerfully.

Mokka turned for further talk with his followers. A few minutes later he turned back to Hal.

"It has been decided," announced the Moro. "We take your head off now. To-night one of my men he creep up close and leave your head where sentry-man can find it on the ground."

"Fine!" announced Sergeant Overton mockingly. Yet it was natural that his heart should sink with dread, and it did, for these brown men have no scruples about taking any life that interferes with their own plans. They may have some god of their own to whom they pray, but, if so, it must be a deity that approves of slaying in cold blood.

"We do it now," continued Mokka, "while there plenty light."

Then he turned to one of his brown men, speaking in the Moro tongue. From under his blouse the fellow addressed drew forth a dagger, long, slim, needle-pointed, which he passed to Mokka.

A second brown man produced another kind of weapon—a broad blunt-pointed, heavy-bladed knife with a keen cutting edge. There was no need to tell the Army boy the uses of these weapons. The first was to be used to send Hal Overton's spirit out of the world; the second would sever his head from his shoulders according to program.

"You ready, eh? demanded Mokka, approaching Sergeant Hal. "You good soldier? You die brave—or you have to be held?"

"You'll find me brave enough for all your purposes, Mokka, you infamous scoundrel," retorted the Army boy, eyeing the fellow steadily.

"Good! Then it be over right away!"

"So be it, Mokka. But are you man enough to allow a white man to die in his own way?"

"What way?" asked the brown man, looking puzzled.

"White men, when they may, Mokka, pray before dying. They seek to prepare their road into the next world."

"Oh, all right," conceded Mokka. "You pray plenty, if you not take too long."

These bandits were so accustomed to killing that they took the proceeding in a shockingly matter-of-fact way. Provided he did not delay their plans too long the Army boy might pray.

Hal Overton turned his back and sank to his knees. He did not fear a sudden thrust between the shoulder blades. He trusted to Moro curiosity for that. These rascals would be curious to see how a white man prayed.

It was a solemn five minutes that the boyish young sergeant spent on his knees. He was not afraid to die, in the coward's sense of fear, and he was thankful that, at least, he might die in Uncle Sam's good old uniform, the national livery of honor.

"Time is up! You through?" inquired Mokka, at last, touching the Army boy lightly on the shoulder.

"Yes; I'm ready," assented Hal.

Though his hands were bound behind his back he did not trouble the enemy for a lift to his feet. He was athlete enough to sway his body, then leap to his feet standing.

Hal turned about on the now silent group of stolid-looking brown men. He stepped sideways under the tree, bracing himself against the trunk.

"Go ahead when you're ready," he said coolly.

CHAPTER XI

THE ARMY BOY'S ONE KICK

MOKKA had laid the heavier knife on the ground. But the lighter blade was in his right hand as he advanced softly, springily.

"You brave man," he nodded. "And now!"

Mokka slowly raised his arm, holding the slender blade aloft for the stroke.

Just at that instant something moved in the bushes that were within Hal Overton's range of vision.

What it was the young sergeant did not have time to see, nor was there time in that swift instant to think.

Braced as he was against the tree trunk it was easy for the Army boy to shift to his left foot. Swiftly and strongly his right foot rose, catching Mokka in the stomach.

Bang! A rifle spoke out in the bushes—a flash of fire jetted out straight into the gloom, and a bullet sped through the brain of a Moro standing near.

Almost in the same instant another shot was

fired, and then the good old Army cheer rose.

Nor did the Moros pause to fight. So certain were they that they had been outnumbered that they turned and bolted, not even stopping to pick up their rifles that lay on the ground.

Two dead Moros and Mokka, lying breathless on the ground from Hal's kick—that was all that was left on the spot of the enemy when the army charged up.

It was rather a small army, in fact, represented only by Privates Kelly and Slosson.

"I'm thinking we got here in what's called the nick o' time," chuckled Kelly, as he gave the boyish sergeant a hug. Slosson busied himself more practically in swiftly untying the cords at Overton's wrists.

"Kelly, you can spend your time well by watching that that bag of brown skin doesn't get away," remarked Slosson.

Kelly thereupon bestowed himself generously upon the prostrate Mokka, until Slosson was able to pass down the cord removed from Hal's wrists.

In a trice, then, the Moro felt his hands securely bound. But Mokka, despite his helplessness, raised his voice in loud words that echoed through the forest.

"Now, what's he singing?" demanded Kelly, with a downward glance at the brown man.

"He's sending word," guessed Hal, "that there are only three of us here."

"We've all the guns belonging to the limbs o' Satan, anyway," chuckled Kelly. "Nor will it be long before there's more than three soldiers here. Our two shots will serve as a signal —and here's more of the same kind."

Raising his rifle to his shoulder Kelly emptied his magazine, the barks following in rapid succession.

"Now, let the brownies get together and visit us when they're ready," chuckled Kelly gleefully.

Hal's first care had been to find his rifle and ammunition belt, left behind in the flurry by the Moro who had temporarily appropriated them.

"Now, until help gets here, we must be careful," warned Hal. "Three men can't stand off much of an attack unless they're under cover. Down to the ground with you. Kelly, you face west, and you east, Slosson. I'll watch the prisoner."

Hal, too, crouched close to Mokka.

It was not long before there was a slight sound of moving feet, and a voice demanded:

"Sergeant, where are you?"

"Here, Corporal Hyman."

In another minute Hyman and four men came

into the circle under the trees. After that other soldiers began to arrive by twos and threes. They came from all directions.

"Why, I thought Mokka sent out four of his men as scouts," muttered Hal, in astonishment. "Yet they didn't bring any alarm in."

"They were all together at one point," laughed Hyman. "When we get back to the road you'll find some of our men guarding 'em. They were all huddled in one outpost. We got the drop on the rascals and bagged 'em."

"Are all the men in now, Hyman, except the men at the road?"

"All in, Sergeant."

"Then lead the detachment out of here, Corporal. I'll keep this fellow, Mokka, under my own especial eye."

"You found me in mighty quick time, Corporal," remarked Hal, when a halt had been called at the roadside.

"We'd a found you quicker, Sergeant, only the brown monkeys played a clever trick on us."

"What was that?"

"Why, we found the spot where you had had a scuffle with the rascals. The marks on the ground told that story."

"And you followed the trail away from there?"

"For a little way, and then we found it crossed by another trail. Further on both trails were crossed by other trails. If we had followed any one trail we'd have been looking for you yet. So I had to split the command up and send two or three men on each trail. Kelly and Slosson had the luck to find you first."

"Then see here, Hyman, if there were so many crossed trails in the forest, then there are more Moros about than were in the party that grabbed me."

"There surely are, Sergeant."

"Then we'll fall in now, before it's too dark. I don't want a night attack on this road if I can avoid it. The enemy have their best chances in the dark."

The four prisoners besides Mokka were compelled to carry all the Moro arms that had been captured. Hal wisely decided to keep a point in advance until the town of Bantoc had been entered. Hyman took command of the point.

By a quick march the youthful sergeant entered the town of Bantoc before dark. In fact, by the time that the sun was down he had his men and prisoners on the further side of Bantoc, out on the road leading to Fort Benjamin Franklin.

Then in on the post marched the little column. Halting his command near the guard

house Hal hastened over to Captain Cortland's quarters to report.

"Take Mokka in to see Draney," directed Captain Cortland, with a grin, as soon as he had heard the young sergeant's first rapid story. "I want to break down Draney's nerve by every fair means, and I think the sight of Mokka, captured by you, Sergeant, as was Draney himself, will make the white scoundrel feel a good deal less sure of himself."

"Shall I turn Mokka over to the guard afterward, sir?"

"I shall be out there, Sergeant, and will give the necessary orders afterward. In fact, I will go along and get a look at Draney's face when he sees his henchman in the toils."

"Bring that prisoner along, Kelly," directed Hal, as he and the post commander reached the detachment.

Then the party moved on into the guard house.

"Here's a friend of yours, Draney, who wants to gaze on your face," announced Captain Cortland.

"He's the first visitor you've admitted to see me," growled the planter in the cell.

Then his glance discovered that Mokka's hands were held behind him.

"Is the man a prisoner?" asked Draney,

with a somewhat crestfallen look on his face.

"Not quite as much as you are, Draney," replied Captain Cortland. "You're good for a life sentence after your trial. Mokka is accused only of attempting to murder a non-commissioned officer, and I fancy he will get off with twenty years of imprisonment, or maybe a little less."

"You're hounding everybody that belong to me!" growled Draney.

"This man, acting in your name, did his best to kill Sergeant Overton," retorted the post commander.

"I suppose you have it all framed up to prove it against the poor fellow, just because he has been a servant of mine," growled Draney hotly.

"Remove the prisoner, Kelly. Hold him outside."

"Very good, sir."

"Since the fellow was my servant, you might at least let him stay in this cell with me," urged Draney.

"We wouldn't trust two such scoundrels together," replied Captain Cortland briefly.

As Kelly swung Mokka around to lead him out the Moro began to talk rapidly in his own tongue, Draney listening.

"Stop it, ye heathen!" admonished Private

Kelly, bringing a hand with a good deal of force across the brown man's mouth.

"Don't abuse the prisoner, Kelly," warned the post commander quickly.

"I'll not, sir, if he'll keep his tongue quiet. But d'ye want the brownie, sir, talking in secret to Mister Draney?"

"I do not," Captain Cortland agreed.

Mokka, however, had learned the wisdom of silence, and Kelly hustled him out of the guard house.

"Draney," went on the post commander, "I did not feel that we needed any further evidence against you. The conduct of your man to-day, however, will furnish another rivet for your shackles."

"We'll see!" snarled Draney. "The end is not yet, and maybe you'll not be the one to write 'finish' on this business."

"You still hope, do you, Draney, that your Moro friends will be able to attack this post and rescue you?"

"Never mind what I think!"

"It may be as well to let you know, Draney, that, in case of any attack on this post, if there seems any doubt about our being able to hold our prisoners, the guard have standing orders to shoot you rather than allow you to be rescued."

At that information Draney's face blanched. Beads of sweat stood out all over his forehead.

"That—that's a coward trick on the part of a man who has a little power for a little while," the planter muttered hoarsely.

"No, Draney; it is nothing of the sort," retorted Captain Cortland sternly. "It is merely an earnest of my determination that no force of Moros shall, under any circumstances, be allowed to rescue you before the court at Manila has had a chance to pass on your case. If you have any hope whatever of being rescued, dismiss it as a dream that, at the most, can only lead you to the grave! Sergeant Overton, follow me."

The guard house, first of all, is a place of detention for soldiers themselves, when they are guilty of serious breaches of discipline. Draney, as a white man, might be confined there, but Captain Cortland did not propose to degrade even disobedient soldiers by making the guard house into a detention-pen for natives. So the four other Moros and Mokka were taken to an unused cellar in the building used by the post quartermaster officer. A ponderous trap door led down into the cellar. It could be padlocked down so securely that prisoners could not break out. The only other openings to the cellar were four tiny windows, covered by grat-

ings, and too narrow for the smallest Moro to wedge his way through anyway.

In this cellar, for want of a better place, the native prisoners were placed; a sentry was ordered to inspect the building on the outside from time to time, and the sergeant of the guard was directed to see that the brown prisoners were supplied with blankets, food and water.

"I'm pretty sure the prisoners won't get out of there without outside help," murmured the post commander grimly, as he turned away with Sergeant Hal.

"May I ask, sir, if Lieutenant Prescott returned from Seaforth's?"

"Yes; Mr. Prescott and his command returned at about two o'clock this afternoon. The Moros vanished without firing a shot when they saw the troops coming up. Sergeant Overton, your men have not had their supper yet?" continued Captain Cortland, as he and his youthful sergeant reached the parade ground.

"No, sir."

"Rout out the company cook and instruct him, by my direction, to provide the men of your detachment with a hot supper as speedily as possible. See to it yourself, Sergeant, that the meal is a good and a speedy one."

"Thank you, sir."

At that instant the post commander clutched the Army boy by the arm, muttering:

"Do you see *that*—in the sky?"

Hal looked. Signal rockets were arching up, spelling out the call from Seaforth's.

Nor had these quite faded when another signal traversed the sky in a different direction.

"Corporal of the guard, post number four!" hailed a sentry's voice.

Captain Cortland caught the corporal hastening by.

"Corporal, if the sentry has to report signals from Seaforth's and Henderson's, inform him that they have already been seen."

CHAPTER XII

ALL IN THE SOLDIER'S DAY

"THAT supper can wait for five minutes, Sergeant Overton," added Captain Cortland. "Run to the officers' quarters and summon all the officers to meet me here. Do not wait to knock at each door. Call the order."

In a twinkling the officers reported. Hal, not having been dismissed by the post commander, stood at a respectful distance from the group

of men in shoulder-straps awaiting their orders.

"The Moro plan is plain, Cortland," remarked Captain Freeman. "The bandits are going to keep up the attacks by night, and cover as many points as they can. They intend to run the legs of our men off. There probably won't be any fights, unless the rascals catch our men off their guard, or waylay our troops in overwhelming numbers. But I see soldier shoe-leather being worn out fast."

"Yes," muttered Cortland disgustedly. "I wouldn't mind so much if I had four companies here instead of two. Corporal of the guard, run as far as barracks entrance and pass the word for Sergeants Gray and Terry, B Company, to report here on the jump."

Gray and Noll reported within the minute. Each was ordered to start at once with fifteen men, Gray to hasten to Seaforth's and Noll to Henderson's.

"Sergeants, look out for ambush on the way. After you reach your destinations I imagine that the Moros will retire. I dislike sending you with so few men, but I expect that the bandits will attack at other points. It may be necessary to send out several squads to-night, so I must make each squad small."

Ten minutes later both squads were under way.

Captain Cortland turned suddenly, to espy Sergeant Hal.

"Sergeant, why are you here?"

"Waiting to be dismissed, sir. With your permission I'll hurry and pass the supper order. You may want my squad again to-night, sir."

"Eat by all means, but I shall not send you out again to-night, Sergeant Overton. I plan to keep at least half of the command here, resting and prepared at any moment for the possible defence of this post."

Sergeant Noll ran into bad luck that night. It did not in any way reflect on his skill as a commander, for he took all precautions on the road. But on the way to Henderson's the boyish sergeant's little detachment was fired upon from ambush, and almost immediately after the detachment was attacked in a rush by Moro swordsmen. Under fire Noll lost one man killed and two wounded, one badly. In the sword rush he had three more men wounded, though none of these dangerously. In spite of it all, however, Sergeant Terry kept on to his objective, carrying the casualties who needed assistance, and carrying also the dead comrade.

Nor did Sergeant Gray's men go scathless. They, too, fell in with an ambush on the dark-

est part of the road between Draney's and Seaforth's, and the sergeant had three of his men wounded, though none dangerously.

In both instances, after the detachment reached their destinations, they were troubled no more by the enemy, which vanished.

What added to the difficulty of the soldiers in catching their defeated opponents was the fact that fleeing Moros often ran back to their homes, or to their work on other plantations, hid their weapons and then produced friends or neighbors to swear that these were "good Moros."

Other planters were also attacked, though in no case by great numbers of the brown miscreants. What was done was just enough to keep the troops in motion most of the time.

Though Captain Cortland lost several men from his command, the Moros, within ten days, had lost nearly two hundred in killed, as far as could be ascertained, and more in wounded.

"But the bad element among the natives are as thick as flies, and obey their dattos, no matter how many their defeats," grumbled Captain Cortland.

Sergeant Hal, in the times that he was sent out, had half a dozen brisk little skirmishes with fleeting bands of Moros.

"The brownies are getting us trained to this

sending out of small expeditions," Hal remarked to his chum, one afternoon. "One of these days, Noll, the Moros will get out in numbers, waylay one of our small squads, and wipe it off the face of the earth."

"That's all in the soldier's day," replied Sergeant Terry dryly.

"Yes, Noll; you're right there. The soldier has no right to complain at the thought of taking his own medicine. But what roils me in advance is the thought of the huge satisfaction it will give the Moros, all the way from their white leader, Draney, down."

"Sergeant Overton is directed to report immediately to the commanding officer," called an orderly.

Hal arose with alacrity, and a few moments later entered Captain Cortland's office, saluting and standing at attention.

"Another Marathon race for you, Sergeant," announced Captain Cortland dryly.

"I'm ready for it, sir."

"Word has just been brought me by this gentleman," continued the captain, indicating a white visitor whom the Army boy now noticed for the first time. "Natives in whom Mr. Whitely trusts have come in from the interior with word that the house at Kittredge's plantation is surrounded, and that a brisk fight was

going on. You will take twelve men and go there at once, Sergeant. You know the road to Kittredge's?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"It is eleven miles, down the road that leads to Seaforth's, but only three miles from Seaforth's."

"I know the way, sir."

"Then assemble and march your men, Sergeant, as quickly as you can. Lieutenant Prescott will be on the parade ground to inspect you."

Back in barracks Hal Overton did not grumble, though three of the men whom he selected did.

"What are you men in the service for, if you can't stand the life?" Hal demanded briskly.

"It's this eternal hiking for nothing that we don't like," returned one of the men.

"Cheer up," smiled Hal. "It's all in the soldier's day. Move about lively now. Lieutenant Prescott is waiting to inspect us. Tumble out there!"

In a little while the squad had been made ready and was on its way, moving at a swinging route step. Nor could an officer of any grade have taken more precautions against ambush than Sergeant Overton did once he turned out on the country road.

Before dark Sergeant Hal sighted the plantation without having found any sign of the enemy. Moreover Kittredge and three other white men, his helpers in the management of the estate, were seated on the front porch reading.

"Hello, Sergeant, where's the trouble?" hailed Kittredge, rising and coming down the roadway.

"Here, we were told," Hal answered.

"Then some one has taken a lot of trouble to fool you," Kittredge answered. "This is one place that the Moros avoid."

"It's the only place, then," returned the Army boy.

"Come inside the front hallway and I'll show you why the Moros avoid us," went on Kittredge, laughing. He took his soldier guest inside and pointed to two glistening, well-oiled Gatling guns.

"We imported these, three years ago, by consent of the military authorities," explained Kittredge. "Just once, after that, we were attacked, one night. We raked the woods all around here, and since then the Moros have given us the go-by. They could get us, perhaps, if they came in great enough force, but they are well aware that it would cost them more lives than they want to pay."

"Mr. Kittredge," cried the young sergeant, "will you permit me to compliment you on being a man of brains as well as one with sand?"

"Not all the planters could use these machines if they had 'em, Sergeant," replied the planter. "As a military man you know that it requires a trained man to use a Gatling with any effect. Two of my assistants, however, know just how to use this pair of machines. We are not foolish enough to go along without watching the country around us, but we don't really fear the natives much. This house is more of a fort than a dwelling."

"I wonder how that remarkable hoax ever got to us?" pondered the Army boy indignantly.

"It's a hoax, depend upon it."

"But a decent white man brought us the tip."

"He got it from the natives, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Then your informant was as badly fooled as you are."

"There's nothing for us to do then but to march back."

"One thing more, Sergeant. Since you took this long hike to help us, we can't let you go back until your command has had supper."

"Thank you, sir."

So it was nearly two hours after dark when Sergeant Overton ordered his men to fall in. As they marched away there were many grumblers in the ranks.

"Captain Cortland will be boiling mad about this," muttered the Army boy, as he and his men trudged wearily along. "But I don't believe that Mr. Whitely doubted the information that he brought."

This was exactly the case. Mr. Whitely had imagined that he was bringing a true report of an attack on Kittredge's plantation.

Having too few men to be able to put an effective point in advance the young sergeant himself strode on about sixty feet ahead of his first file.

At every step Hal looked keenly to right and left of him, and also peered down the road ahead of him. There had been a new moon that evening, but it had already set, leaving the road utterly dark under the shadows of the great trees that lined it.

"The brown men couldn't find a better place for an ambush," thought the young sergeant, who, by this time, had covered more than half of the distance from Kittredge's.

Yet it was for his men that he was anxious. Like any other real military commander Hal

Overton felt his responsibility so keenly that he forgot about danger to himself.

"If I see the first sign of anything ahead, I'll halt, then move forward in skirmish line," Hal decided.

Somehow he could not rid himself of the premonition that the hoax of the afternoon would prove but a lure to draw one squad of Uncle Sam's men into a trap.

Pausing a moment in the road Overton called back an unusual command. Troops seldom march with their pieces loaded, but now Hal called back in a low voice:

"Pass the word back for each man to load his magazine. Let your bolts back carefully. We don't want any accidental shots fired."

Then he strode ahead once more. Nor had he gone more than two hundred feet when the stillness was punctuated by a single, sharp:

Crack!

It was the signal shot from ambush. Instantly at least forty concealed rifles followed in an irregular volley.

Sergeant Hal wavered, reeled, then dropped as his men ran up in a skirmish line for which no order had been given.

CHAPTER XIII

CAUGHT IN THE MORO TRAP

HAL OVERTON rolled over slightly, but did not attempt to rise.

"Lie down!" he yelled, as the skirmish line reached him.

In an instant the little line fell, lying across the road and extending into the forest on either side.

None too soon either, for the country just ahead suddenly blazed with the fire flashing from two or three hundred rifles. Bullets swept by as thickly as a swarm of insects.

"Begin firing at will," ordered the young sergeant. Uncle Sam's few men barked back with a right good will, each man selecting his own target from the flashes ahead. Army Springfields cracked spitefully, but both sides were shooting in the dark, save for such illumination as was furnished by the flashes from the guns.

At first the Moro fire went too high—a common fault in the opening of an engagement, and especially when neither side sees the enemy well.

Then some of the Mauser bullets from the

Moros began to spit up the dust ahead in the road.

Sergeant Hal was already on his knees, crouching low, leaving a little trail of blood behind him as he moved.

"You men in there!" yelled Overton, trying to make himself heard above the din of the firing, as he reached the men in the edge of the forest at the left of the road. "Watch your chance to slip into the woods on the other side of the road. We can make our best stand there."

He waited to see only that he was understood, then crawled back into the road again.

The American fire had slackened somewhat, for, the first excitement over, the regulars were coolly trying to make their shots tell, and fired only when they were reasonably sure that the enemy was in line behind his flash.

Presently, too, the Moro fire slackened, but Hal knew that this was no sign that the brown men were tired of the battle. They, too, were waiting for the enemy to expose itself.

"Crawl across the road!" ordered Sergeant Hal briskly. "Into the woods! We'll make our stand there behind a trench wall."

Once under cover of the trees Sergeant Hal ordered a brisk dash for some fifty yards into the forest.

Here he could not see well, but Overton picked out what he judged would be the best place for his purpose.

"Halt!" he ordered. "Kelly, take charge of the firing—and don't waste cartridges. Slosson, Peters, Green, Hepton—get out your intrenching tools and help me."

"You're wounded, Sergeant?" demanded Private Willie Green, otherwise known as "Long" Green, from his former habit of carrying considerable sums of money with him.

"Yes," admitted Hal. "We'll all be if we don't soon have something solid to fight behind."

"Let me put on your first-aid bandage, Sarge," begged Green. "The others can dig fast enough."

"Get at the digging—here, on this side," ordered Hal Overton crisply. With his own trenching tool he began to stake out a rough line. Even in the dark his helpers could follow the line well enough to dig the trench. How the dirt was made to fly! First of all Sergeant Hal threw up a trench, some twenty feet long, on the side toward the distant town of Bantoc.

"Have your men crawl in here, Kelly, one at a time," Hal called. "Don't all come at once. Come one at a time, and keep up the firing."

Before Kelly and the firing line had all crawled behind the trench Hal had started another and shorter line on the side toward the road.

Then he sent his helpers back to the firing line, drawing on Kelly for fresh men for the digging. A third side of the little fort went up, then the fourth.

Just as the line of earthwork was completed an angry exclamation came from "Long" Green.

"Hit, Willie?" called Sergeant Overton.

"Yes; in my shoulder, and it smarts."

"Drop back here then, and I'll help you dress it," proposed young Overton.

"I'll take care of it, Sarge, after you've dressed your own wound," retorted "Long," filling the magazine of his rifle.

"Watch the heathen!" yelled Kelly. "They're creeping up on us."

The Moro fire had almost ceased, for the time being, but Kelly's sharp eyes had noted several crawling figures coming nearer.

"Look out for a sword rush!" called Hal suddenly, throwing open his magazine, and crowding in the cartridges. "Remember, men, there's no sense in living forever, but don't let the brownies get you without doing a lot to them first!"

It was a grim situation. Hal judged that the enemy, which was unseen but could be partly judged by its firing, must number three or four hundred men. If the Moros once crept near enough they could then close in on the little fort with a rush, accept a few casualties, and overwhelm the regulars with steel.

Trench digging stopped for the moment. Every soldier slipped cartridges into his magazine and waited. The regular fire stopped in that moment.

"Hi-yi-yi-yu-u-u-u-u!" rang the sudden hoarse yell of the Moros ahead. Scores of dimly visible figures leaped to their feet. Even in the dark the dull flash of the steel just ahead was ominous.

"Now give it to 'em!" yelled Sergeant Hal. "Pump into them as fast as you can fire."

Right gallantly did the little detachment respond. The Moros had started their rush. But they had gained only twenty yards when they were glad to stop and throw themselves down on their faces.

"Keep up the firing, but don't shoot as fast!" rang Hal's strong, resonant voice. "If we ever let the rascals creep up on us they'll have us cooked!"

The firing of the regulars continued steadily and these keen-eyed young men, when put to it,

managed tolerably well to make out the forms of the prowlers before them. Many a yell told where a Yankee bullet had winged a brown man. Yet the Moros were dogged. They did not propose to be driven back.

And now the brown riflemen began on another side of the little fort, pouring in a leaden storm that threw dirt all over the defenders. A regular rose, tottered, lurched and fell across the youthful sergeant.

Hal Overton gently moved the body from him, looked at the face, and asked:

"What's the matter, Hepton? Hit badly?"

Hepton did not reply. He had run across hard luck; he was dead.

There were but seven men now on the Bantoc side of the little fort. Hal and four others were watching the flanks, for there were Moros all about them in the sheltering dark.

The Moro firing ceased. The regulars followed suit. On the defensive, and not having unlimited ammunition, Uncle Sam's fighting men could only wait to check the moves of the enemy.

"Every man take out his bayonet, and keep it on the ground, right within reach," called Hal Overton quietly. He did that with his own bayonet.

Suddenly the Moro firing began again, more

heavily than ever, and coming from the front and the left flank.

"Don't answer!" commanded Hal. "Save your fire, and crouch low."

Within ninety seconds his first guess was verified. The Moro fusillade had been but the prelude to another attempt to rush the fort with steel.

"Hi-yi-yi-yu-u-u-u!" came the blood-curdling challenge of the Moro swordsmen.

"Let go, and pot every brownie you can," ordered Sergeant Hal.

Again the air rang with the sharp, frequent discharges of the Springfields.

"Cease firing!" bellowed the Army boy, for he believed that the steel rush had been checked once more.

Now through the woods all was nearly silent. The loudest sound that came to the regulars was where some Moro, in skulking, disturbed the underbrush.

At last the stillness was broken by half a dozen scattering Moro shots. Private Peters, rising too high behind the trench wall, in order to get a better shot, fell back, dropping his rifle, one hand going convulsively to his right breast.

"Hit, Peters?" asked Hal, crawling toward him.

"Yes, but it's nothing," replied Peters. "Let me get—my wind—and I'll——"

The wounded man was interrupted by a fit of coughing, during which he spat up blood.

"——I'll go to the line again," he finished.

Even in the dark Sergeant Overton could see the great, dark stain that covered the soldier's right hand, held over the breast.

Private Peters was little likely ever to go to the line again. He was drilled through the right lung by the bullet from the rifle of some half-clad, skulking Moro out there beyond in the darkness.

"You'll lie quiet, Peters, old man—that's what you'll do," spoke Hal tenderly, as he reached for his own first-aid package.

Every soldier going into the field carries a first-aid package. It is sealed, and contains a roll of sterilized gauze. Opening his own package, Sergeant Hal dressed the wound as well as he could with the man's clothing in the way.

"You ought to—have saved—that first-aid for yourself, Sarge," spoke Private Peters feebly, and ended in another fit of bloody coughing.

"Hm! My little bruise must have healed by this time," retorted Sergeant Overton.

Before Hal had turned away from the stricken man the firing opened again. Yet, over

the noise of gunpowder came the exulting Moro yell as the little brown fiends rose, here and there, advancing by rushes.

"Trent," called Hal, creeping up and laying a hand on the arm of a soldier, "you're too much exposed. Shove over a foot and a half and get in line with that tree just beyond——"

Instead of obeying, Trent gave a shivery start, tried to rise and rolled over, a bullet through the center of his forehead, a thin little line of blood trickling from the wound. Trent had gone to the next world ahead of Peters.

R-r-r-rip! rip! rip! r-r-r-r-r-rip! rang out the Moro firing ahead. It followed on the flank, until the thudding bullets striking the top of the trench walls made a commotion like a dust storm.

Hal Overton in person saw to it that his men lay flat behind the trench. Then came a sudden stopping of rifle fire, followed by a wild yell.

"Up and at 'em! Pump fast!" ordered the youthful sergeant. "It's the enemy's riflemen advancing by rushes."

For a few moments Uncle Sam's Springfields answered with a lively echoing din. Then the firing stopped, like the passing of a thunderstorm.

But Kelly was growling and nursing a wounded right hand.

"You'd better get back, Kelly," advised Overton.

"Niver the bit I will, Sarge!" snarled Kelly. "I can fire half as fast, anyway!"

"Hi-yi-yi-yu-u-u-u-u!" shrilled the chorus of Moro swordsmen.

"Fix bayonets!" rang Hal Overton's voice, calm in this crisis. "Give 'em all the steam you've got in you!"

For by this time the swordsmen were so close that they were rushing on regardless of opposition.

"They can rush us and finish us now!" thought Hal. "But we'll have some of the wild fun of the night before we go down!"

Half rising the regulars fired what was left in their magazines, and did it coolly.

But not a man in the little fort believed that the oncoming tide of steel and death could be stayed. Little clicks sounded on every side as the few bayonets were made fast at the muzzles of as few rifles.

"Now, give 'em—*poison!*" yelled Sergeant Hal hoarsely, as he took his own place in the line.

All firing had stopped. Everything had stopped but the moving feet of the onrushing cold steel men of the Moros.

"Feint for their faces, but land the steel in

their belt lines!" sounded Hal Overton's steady voice an instant later.

It was not a brutal order. This was the style of fighting most effective with the Moros, and this was the last chapter in a life-and-death story for the regulars—whipped but never surrendering!

CHAPTER XIV

FACING THE SOLDIER'S END

JUST before steel met steel in the last expiring effort of Uncle Sam's few but grim young men, the firing broke out again toward Bantoc.

Nor did any of the bullets sweep over the fort.

Ta-r-ra-ta-ta! sounded a bugle. Then it came again.

"Have I gone crazy?" suddenly demanded Hal Overton of himself, as he waited there, tensed for death.

A cavalry bugle in the distance had sounded the well-known call for "trot." Immediately after it rang out again—"gallop!"

"There isn't a single cavalryman in the Misamis district!" muttered Sergeant Overton. "This is all some hideous trick of the Moros."

The brown swordsmen, the nearest within sixty feet of the little fort, had suddenly thrown themselves down.

"Fire on them!" ordered Hal, more steadily, after his first instant of surprise. "Don't let them play any tricks on us."

As the Springfields began barking, the swordsmen, reached by others of their crew, half rose and fled, skulking into the darkness.

"Sergeant Overton?" bawled a lusty, trumpet-like voice down the road.

"Here!" Hal answered with all his lung-power, though he did not recognize the voice. It was no one from "Fort Frank."

"Hold steady, Sergeant! Relief coming!"

From the few regulars crouching within the trench rose a cheer. Yet not one of them could guess at the meaning of it all.

But the sound of horses' hoofs was on the air. These Misamis Moros did not fight on horseback. If they had adopted cavalry tactics at last it was a new trick.

"Hadn't we better give 'em something warm, Sarge?" demanded Kelly hoarsely.

"No; that was a voice speaking in English."

"Some of the Moros know a few words of English, Sarge. Where would American cavalry be coming from?"

All this while firing sounded off the Bantoc way, though it seemed gradually to be receding.

Then out of the deeper darkness rode several horsemen—little fellows, and brown skinned!

"I knew 'twas treachery!" yelled Kelly, bringing his rifle to his shoulder. But Hal struck it up.

Bang! Slosson had fired in the direction of the little brown horsemen!

"Stop it, Slosson!" yelled Hal, hoarsely. 'I'll brain the next man who fires without orders. See, these men wear the regulation khaki."

Now the foremost of the horsemen rode forward, holding their rifles horizontally over their heads.

"*Amigos*—friends!" shouted two or three of the brown men. Instead of showing fear they were grinning. Certainly they displayed no hostile intent.

Then out of the darkness a young officer spurred his way along the mounted column.

"Don't shoot, Thirty-fourth!" bawled this officer lustily. "These are my men—Philippine Scouts!"

"Give 'em a cheer, men!" yelled Sergeant Hal.

What a lusty cheer it was, straight from the chests of a handful of overjoyed regulars!

Then the officer reined in his horse, handed the reins to one of his men and leaped down from saddle, striding forward.

"Sergeant Overton?" he demanded.

"Here, sir!"

"I was afraid I'd find you wiped out," cried the young man, extending his hand, which Hal gripped with all the fervor of a soldier. "Have you been badly cut up?"

"Two men killed, one perhaps fatally hurt, and four besides myself more or less wounded."

"That's pretty bad for a detachment of thirteen men," muttered the officer. "But I forget that I haven't introduced myself. I am——"

"Wait, sir!" cried Hal Overton. "I think I can name you. Your name is Davis."

"Right."

"Your father is Major Davis of the cavalry ——"

"Lieutenant-Colonel Davis, now," spoke the young man proudly. "But where did you ever see me, Sergeant?"

"At the New York recruiting rendezvous," Hal answered. "Then you were Corporal Davis, sir, and working for a commission."

"Ah, now I remember you, Overton," cried the lieutenant of native scouts, again offering his hand. "We had so many recruits pass

through our hands that I had forgotten your face for the moment. Now, I know you. And Private Terry?"

"Sergeant Terry, sir. He's with our company yet."

"You two young men, when on your way to join your regiment, ran into a lively sort of an affair with my father, then Major Davis," ran on the lieutenant of scouts. "Father wrote me about it, after it happened. You two were held up, at the rookie rendezvous, I can assure you, as models of what new men in the Army should be like. Well, well! When I was ordered out to find Sergeant Overton the name had slipped my memory of the old days. But I'm glad to find you, Sergeant, and sorry that the Moros cut you up so badly before we could get through to you."

"Sir, may I ask who is doing that firing off there?" spoke Hal.

"The discounted men of our command, under Major Broughton. But I forget. You probably don't know that a battalion of Philippine Scouts landed at Bantoc this evening, just before dark."

"I didn't know there were any scouts coming, sir."

"No; but your officers did, for Captain Cortland asked for reinforcements more than a

fortnight ago. The department commander thought that the Philippine Scouts could handle the situation best of all. And such men as ours can, Sergeant. All the scouts in our battalion are Macabebes."

Lieutenant Davis spoke proudly. He had a right to do so. Of all the native troops serving Uncle Sam in the Philippine Islands the Macabebes are the very cream. These Macabebes are invariably brave, unfalteringly loyal—always faithful to the death.

The Macabebes are a native tribe having their home district not far north from Manila. They have always been a tribe small in numbers, but with a long and fine military history. Every Macabebe male above sixteen years of age is either a fighting man or a cripple. Small as the Macabebes are in numbers, they were always able to hold their own against the vastly more numerous tribe of Tagalos, to which Aguinaldo, the first insurgent leader against Uncle Sam, belonged.

The Macabebes are proud of themselves, and proud of their American uniforms. Every man of this tribe enters the United States service if he can possibly get in. The American Regular in the Philippines accepts the Macabebe in full comradeship.

"Only forty of our command are mounted,

Sergeant," Lieutenant Davis went on. "The rest are fighting as foot soldiers. Hear our men hammering the Moros over yonder? Hear that yell of our fellows!"

The cheering was faint and far-away now, but the still night air carried it to their listening ears.

The firing in the distance was becoming more scattered.

"This will be a bad night for the Moros," laughed Lieutenant Davis. "Major Broughton will keep our men right at the heels of the bandits, and chase them as long as there's anything left to fight. I don't like to be out of it, but my orders extend only to finding and succoring your detachment, Sergeant. We'll wait here for a while. Then, if no orders come, we will march back to Bantoc."

"But how did you know, sir, that we were in this fix?" inquired Hal.

"Why, there was no room for us at the post, so Major Broughton marched his command into Bantoc and camped in the public square—the plaza. Then, for good effect on the natives, the major sent out mounted patrols on the roads leading into Bantoc. So we heard the firing off here, and from the volume of it we knew some mischief on a big scale was afoot. So the major communicated with Captain Cort-

land, and then set off in this direction."

"Will you pardon me, sir, while I go to look at one of my badly wounded men?" Hal asked.

"I'll go with you," volunteered the lieutenant of scouts. "Which is the man?"

"Here, sir," replied Hal, kneeling beside Private Peters.

"Hm! If he was one of your wounded, then you have *three* dead men," replied Lieutenant Davis quietly.

It was true. Peters had gone where the Moros would trouble him no more. Life had oozed out through that bullet hole in his lung. His pulse had stopped, his mouth hung open.

"It's the good men who get that sort of thing," muttered Slosson, solemnly. "I haven't a sign of a scratch to show."

"If you'll take my advice, Sergeant," put in Kelly, "you'll be letting a useless hulk like Slosson look at where you're hit."

"It's here, in the fleshy part of my left leg," returned Hal, unconcernedly, after investigating. "The blood has caked dry, so it will keep until the hospital steward can look at it at Fort Frank."

The men of the Thirty-fourth were now trying to conceal how badly they felt over the loss of the comrades slain. The Macabebes, on the other hand, displayed pronounced sympathy.

This was because the little brown scouts had discovered how much importance Americans attach to sympathy. The Macabebes seldom mourned over their own slain; death was the fortune of war with them, and to be accepted calmly, like any other fortune.

"Major Broughton ranks Captain Cortland, of course, sir?" asked Hal slowly.

"Those are not the major's instructions," replied Lieutenant Davis. "He is to co-operate with Captain Cortland, I believe, and your captain still remains the commandant in this district. Our scouts are here only for a short time, I understand; how long I do not know. But we are to aid the Thirty-fourth in giving the Moro *insurrectos* a campaign of thrashings that they won't easily or soon forget."

"I see pleasant times ahead of us," smiled the Army boy. "After the coming campaign is over the Moros ought to be good for many years to come."

"The Moros and all other disorderly tribes would be good all the time, Sergeant, if the government had troops enough in these islands," replied the officer. "We could get along with something like the present strength of regulars, too, if the government would provide four times as many scouts as it does, and keep the scouts moving all the time to the support of

the regulars. But what's the use of talking? The American people don't know or understand how things go here in the islands, and they don't realize that short-sighted policy as to military strength makes us lose four times as many soldiers every year as we would if we had troops enough to fill the natives all through the islands with wholesome respect. It was the same way in the United States, in the seventies, when we had only a few regiments to handle Indian outbreaks. History is repeating itself in these islands."

The firing had long ceased. In another hour a mounted Macabebe orderly rode up to Lieutenant Davis with a written order.

"We are to return to Bantoc," announced the officer. "Sergeant, I will have some of my men dismount and carry your dead. Your men, with their twenty-two miles of hiking, their fight and their wounds, won't want any extra burdens to-night."

Near the city the mounted scouts, followed by the handful of infantrymen, passed the rest of Major Broughton's command, halted at the side of the road. Lieutenant Davis and his superior officer exchanged salutes as the mounted men rode by. Hal, in passing the major, brought his right hand smartly to his piece in a rifle salute.

Then Hal, followed only by his own survivors and the Macabebes carrying the slain, kept on through the town and out to the post.

Captain Cortland was on hand to hear the report of the casualties.

There was a triple military funeral at Fort Benjamin Franklin the next day.

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN CORTLAND'S BREATH-SNATCHER

THE transport that brought the Macabebes took away Joseph Draney, Kulva, Mokka and the other native prisoners, who were now on their way to Manila to stand trial when it suited the authorities.

A company of Macabebe foot soldiers, accompanied by the mounted men under Lieutenant Davis, left Bantoc for an extended scout. There were reports of Moros encamped in force in the hills, and the scouts went away on a mission of locating these camps and dispersing the rebels if found.

The officers and men of the two companies of the Thirty-fourth were thus left in peace, for a while, to rest and enjoy life after their recent numerous "hikes."

"But our rest will last only until the scouts run into something large and definite," Captain Cortland informed his officers. "The Macabebes are tireless, and are excellent scouts. In a pitched battle, however, where doggedness must prevail, our American infantry is needed to supply the real backbone."

"What's bothering my men in C Company," reported Captain Freeman, "is the fact that this is the day before Thanksgiving, and so far the departmental commissary has failed to reach us with the turkeys, the cranberries, the walnuts and other good home things that the men always look for on Thansgiving."

"It looks as though we were going to be overlooked this year," admitted Captain Cortland.

But they were not. At daylight the next morning the siren whistle was heard from a small "single-stacker" making the harbor. This steamship bore on her single funnel the red, white and blue bands that denoted her as an army transport.

An hour later case after case of cold storage turkeys came ashore. There was, with this supply, an abundance of everything else that goes to make the good cheer of the Thanksgiving table.

At one o'clock that day officers and men at Fort Benjamin Franklin sat down to a spread

that made them think, some with misty eyes, of the good feasts back in "God's country."

Before three o'clock Sergeants Hal and Noll, who had finished their shares of the great spread, were found by an orderly.

"Captain Cortland directs that you report to him immediately."

"If it's a hike," murmured Noll to his chum, "I hope it doesn't start earlier than five o'clock. I don't feel able to go more than a hundred yards at present."

"I could, by an effort, walk two hundred yards," boasted Hal.

Captain Cortland had gone from his dinner to his office. There now lay on his desk before him several letters that had come by the morning's transport.

As the sergeants entered they saluted, then stood at attention.

"Pretty full of dinner, my lads?" inquired the post commander.

"Yes, sir," both admitted.

"If you feel as I do, you'll enjoy seats. Be seated. Now, I have sent for you to tell you something you may be glad to hear, and yet you may not. In the first place, you will have to start for Manila soon after the new year, to be present, when wanted, as witnesses at the trials of Draney and the native prisoners. That

brings me to the other matter. Colonel North has written me that he has had inquiry from the departmental commander as to whether there are any men in the Thirty-fourth who desire to compete for commissions as second lieutenants. Colonel North has asked both Captain Freeman and myself whether we have any men in our respective companies whom we wish recommended."

While Captain Cortland was saying this Hal Overton flushed a deep red, his breath coming short and fast. Noll went rather white. Their company commander was eyeing them keenly in turn.

"Well," he asked, briskly, after a pause, "do you know any one in B Company who wants a chance?"

"Yes, sir, I do," answered Hal, in a voice that sounded rather unnatural.

"You know some one who does, or you want the chance yourself?" insisted Captain Cortland.

"Both, sir," Hal went on, striving to master his voice a little better. "Sergeant Terry and myself are both anxious for commissions."

"And you are both—how old?"

"Each of us will be twenty-one within a few weeks, sir," Hal went on, for Noll seemed to be searching for his tongue somewhere in the back

of his mouth. "I shall be twenty-one first, sir, and Sergeant Terry will be twenty-one in April."

"You have both served more than two years with the colors?"

"Yes, sir."

"No enlisted man can be promoted from the ranks until he has served two years with the colors. And he must be twenty-one years old before he can receive his commission," resumed Captain Cortland. "So far as your soldier records go you are both A 1 enlisted men. I can endorse you both heartily, and so, I am sure, will Colonel North. Undoubtedly you would both pass the required physical examinations before the board of officers. Now, how well prepared are you for your mental examinations?"

"That is a point, sir, on which I would like to take the liberty of consulting you," Hal answered.

"Very good. I will give you any advice in my power. I have known, of course, ever since the old days at Fort Clowdry, that both you men aspired to the winning of commissions in the service. I have heard, too, that you have been studying. How much, I do not know. You are aware of the subjects in which you will be examined?"

"Yes, sir." It was still Hal who was answering.

"Name them, Sergeant Overton."

"The subjects, sir, are arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, surveying, Army regulations, international law, the Constitution of the United States, history, geography, English grammar, chemistry, electricity and elementary mechanics."

"You have been preparing yourselves in all these subjects?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you feel fitted to go before a board for examination?"

Hal Overton hesitated. Noll looked up uncertainly.

"Well, sir, I think," Hal went on, "that we are pretty well along in all the branches in which we must be examined. But only a general review can tell us just how much we really know of these subjects."

"Do you wish to go up in January for examination?"

"If we have a decent show to pass, sir. But, if we should fail this time, does that prejudice our chances in another year?"

"No," replied Captain Cortland, "though of course it is much better not to fail. If you feel that you are going to fail, then it will be better

to wait until another year. If you feel, on the other hand, that you have more than a fighting chance to get by the board, then nothing is to be gained by waiting."

"I—I think I can pass, sir, as I shall have a few more weeks yet in which to prepare myself," said Hal very slowly.

"I—I hope *I* can, sir." Noll had spoken for the first time.

"Now, lads, I have already mentioned this matter to Lieutenant Prescott and Lieutenant Holmes. They are very anxious to welcome you as brother officers one of these days. Mr. Prescott and Mr. Holmes are both more recently from West Point than are any of the other officers of this command. They have volunteered to assist you all they can in the final preparation for your examination."

"That is very kind in them, sir," murmured Hal gratefully.

"It's just like them, sir," added Sergeant Noll.

"Another point," went on Captain Cortland. "Both of you put in your applications to the War Department last February. That is noted on your records."

"Yes, sir," from Hal.

"You have not since withdrawn your applications?"

"Neither of us have, sir."

"Then there is no obstacle to your taking your examinations while you are in Manila. Now, my lads, take a few minutes to think it all over. Do you desire to have your try now for commissions as second lieutenants? Don't answer for a few minutes. I will be back presently."

Guessing that the youthful sergeants might want to talk by themselves, Captain Cortland considerately withdrew.

"O-o-oh, Great Scott!" The pent-up breath escaped young Terry.

"Cold feet?" laughed Hal.

"I—I don't know what to say, old fellow! I've always wanted this chance. Now a commission in the Army never seemed so far away from me. I'm beginning to wonder, Hal, if it isn't enough to be a sergeant for life?"

"That's the next best thing to an officer's commission," Hal assented. "But I'm a hog. I want the whole game."

"Then you're going up for examination?"

"You've got me," Hal sighed. "I want the chance, and yet—and yet——"

"You're afraid you're weak at some point and that you may flunk on the examinations?" Noll guessed.

"Well, I won't say that either. Noll, I—I

believe I'll take the chance and risk everything on the throw!"

"If we should fail," hinted Noll, "we don't need to try next year. We could come back to the regiment and work like the dickens for two years more beforewe go up for the second try."

"That's so," agreed Hal. "Anyway, Noll, we'll always be afraid of this dreadful examination until we've taken it once. Even if we do fail the first time we'll know more about the whole business after that. If we fail the first time, we won't fail the second."

A brisk step sounded outside.

"Here comes the captain. You've got to decide now," muttered Hal.

"Well, Sergeants, have you made up your minds?" inquired Cortland.

Hal looked at his chum, but the latter seemed still undecided.

"Thank you, Captain," replied Sergeant Overton. "We are very grateful for the opportunity and we'll go up for the examinations."

Noll gasped, but said nothing. Then, feverish with the excitement of the moment, the two Army boys found themselves outside the captain's office, and with a tremendous lot to think about.

CHAPTER XVI

"SCHOOL" UNDER DIFFICULTIES

OUT from under a little shelter tent—the Army "dog tent" or "pup house"—crawled Lieutenant Prescott. As he came into the open he rose to his feet, straightened, threw out his chest and took in several deep breaths of the hot tropical air. Now he was wide awake after his nap. As he stopped blinking the young officer's gaze fell upon two young sergeants who had risen from the ground on his appearance, and who now stood at attention, each young non-commissioned officer employing his left hand to hold his rifle barrel, the butts resting on the ground at their sides.

"Oh, our appointment had nearly escaped me, Sergeants," declared the lieutenant apologetically.

"Any time will do, sir—or no time at all," replied Hal, as he and his chum brought their right hands up in formal salute. "We have imposed on you a good deal already, sir."

"I always keep my word—when I can," smiled the lieutenant. "And this matter of being well prepared for your examinations is of

vital importance to you. Take seats on the ground."

After once more saluting Sergeants Overton and Terry obeyed. Lieutenant Prescott dropped to a seat facing them.

"It was some problem in surveying that you wanted to ask me about, I believe?" inquired the West Pointer.

"Yes, sir," Noll admitted.

"What is troubling you now?"

"This problem, sir, of running a true north and south line in the field by the aid of the sun and a plumb line."

"Don't you understand how to do it?"

"I am pretty sure that I do, sir," Noll answered. "But what is bothering me is how to state my solution in the fewest words and yet to set the answer down so that I will receive all the credits for my answer. If you don't mind, I'll show you the way I've written it down."

Lieutenant Prescott received the sheet of paper, glanced over it, and then replied:

"Correct in the main, but I think I can show you a better way, Sergeant. Let me have paper and pencil. Thank you. I'll show you what we were taught about this at West Point. Now, watch the pencil."

Both young sergeants directed their gaze intently on the pencil.

Crack! sounded a rifle, far up in the hills. There was a splintering sound, and the lieutenant held nothing in his right hand. A bullet had carried the pencil away.

"Shabby trick, that," remarked Lieutenant Prescott pleasantly.

"I have another pencil, sir," remarked Noll quietly.

It was the first shot that had been heard that day, but it did not excite the camp much. Sixty men of C Company and forty of B Company occupied the half-hundred little shelter tents that nestled in the shadows along this hill scene. A quarter of a mile down the trail two foot companies of Philippine scouts were similarly encamped. A company of scouts on foot and Lieutenant Davis's forty mounted men were off somewhere in the hills, scouting and trying to find a body of Moros that felt numerous enough and brave enough to offer pitched battle.

At the firing of the shot Lieutenant Prescott showed no concern, nor did he even raise his head to look about. Captain Freeman was in command of the column from the Thirty-fourth, and nothing would be done without the captain's orders.

Nor did any of the soldiers who were dozing in shelter tents come out to see what the shot

meant. One lonesome Moro prowler off in the neighboring hills was not to be permitted to disturb the serenity of a camp of regulars.

"In the first place," explained Lieutenant Prescott, accepting the second pencil from Sergeant Noll, "you understand that the plumb line must be used where——"

R-r-r-r-rip!" interposed an irregular but angry volley from about the same spot where the first shot had sounded. This time bullets tore through tent canvases or threw up little spats of dirt in the camp.

"I hope the Moros are not going to meddle with us in this fashion," observed Mr. Prescott, looking up with a glance that was mildly rebuking. "I can't help but feel that gentlemen don't intrude in that fashion on the conversation of others. But to get back to our problem. The plumb line should be used——"

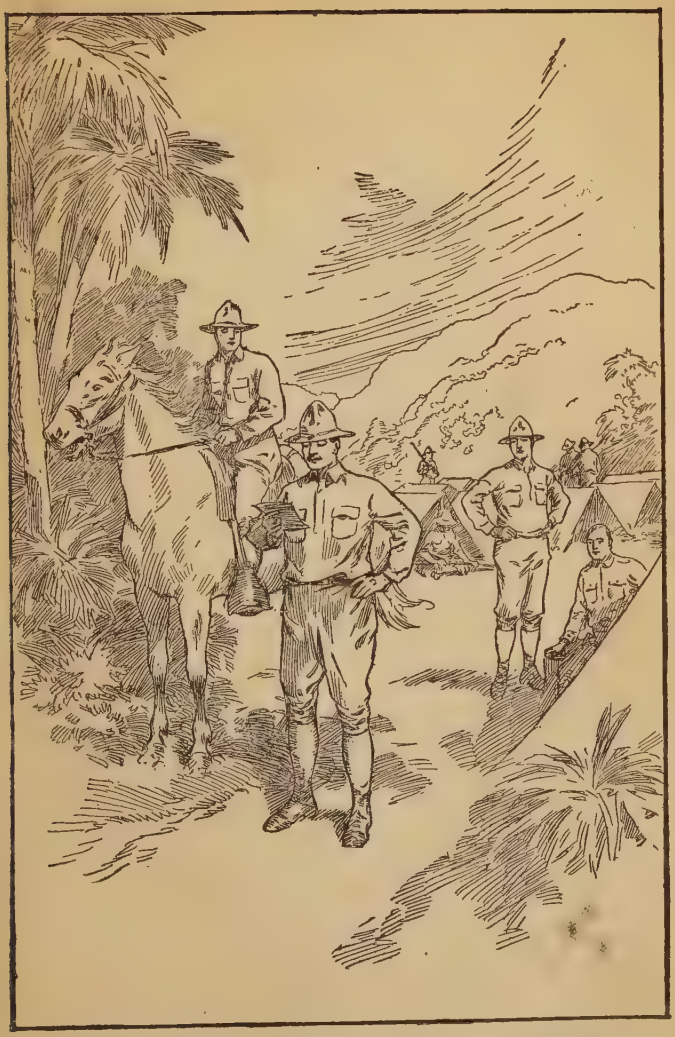
R-r-r-r-rip! sounded another fusillade of shots.

Crack! Cr-r-r-rack! crack! crack! crack!

This second fusillade of shots came from a line of timber barely eight hundred yards away.

"These fellows will have me annoyed, if they keep it up," laughed the lieutenant. "Now, then, the plumb line should be used——"

"Stand by to strike camp!" sounded the



Captain Freeman Glanced Briefly at the Enclosure.

even, steady, but far-carrying tones of Captain Freeman.

In a twinkling the two sergeants leaped to their feet, but Lieutenant Prescott was not an instant behind them. Both sergeants saluted, the officer returning the courtesy.

"We will resume this at our first opportunity," stated the officer.

"Thank you, sir."

The conversation had not interfered with any of the trio reaching his station in time.

Captain Freeman, his field-glasses to his eyes, was watching the belts of timber from which the annoying volleys of shots had come. As he waited there a mounted orderly from the scouts rode up at a gallop, handing the commander of C Company an envelope.

Captain Freeman glanced briefly at the enclosure, scribbled something on it and handed it back to the orderly, who immediately rode away at a gallop.

"The scouts have located a considerable column of Moros in motion," announced Captain Freeman to his two younger officers. "We move in five minutes and will try to close in with the rascals."

Orders were immediately given for striking camp. Tents came down like magic. Each soldier packed one of the jointed tent stacks inside

his half of canvas. The latter was made into rolls and shouldered. The regulars were ready to move.

"Fall in, C Company detachment," called Lieutenant Holmes.

"Fall in, B Company detachment," from Lieutenant Prescott.

Captain Freeman stationed himself at the right of the line.

"Twos right, march."

"Twos right, march."

Where six minutes before had been a United States camp there was now nothing again but ordinarily tropical wilderness. Down the trail Captain Freeman led the way. Soon the regulars were marching past two companies of Philippine scouts, drawn up at the roadside. As Uncle Sam's own men went by the scouts fell in on the left of the line, and the whole column was in motion.

There had been more than a fortnight of this sort of thing. Not a day had gone by in which there was not at least skirmishing. The regulars and their allies, the Scouts, had administered some heavy drubbings to the Moro insurgents, and had sent several important bands of them fleeing in rout.

Many of the Moros belonging to field parties of marauders had deserted and gone to their

homes, or to places of hiding. However, many of the more determined had continued their flight only long enough to find some other Moro chieftain and join his forces.

Here in the Misamis district this considerable field party of regulars and Scouts had inflicted some severe blows on the business of insurrection. That the Moros were now becoming discouraged was well known to the American officers. But this long, serial hike must continue until the last armed Moro had given up the struggle and fled.

Scores of Moros had been killed in this half month of fighting. Several times as many more had been wounded. Nor had the regulars or Scouts escaped without losses.

For two miles the column marched, then halted, as Captain Freeman espied another mounted orderly riding toward him, waving an envelope. A halt was commanded. In an instant Lieutenant Prescott stepped back to the two young sergeants.

"The plumb line," he went on, "must be used in the open, where no shadows will be allowed to interfere. The position of the sun at the moment of——"

"Forward march!" rang down the line, and Prescott hastily darted to the head of his own B Company men to repeat the order.

Now the men moved at greater speed, always following the pace set at the head of the line.

Half a mile further on, four mounted Macabebes were sighted at once, all of them sitting erect in saddle, peering off at the flank. Then Lieutenant Davis rode out of the shadows of the forest, put spurs to his horse, rode up, halted, dismounted, saluted and said something to Captain Freeman.

In an instant more orders rang out. B and C Company men deployed as a line of skirmishers and moved slowly forward in the new direction. The two companies of scouts that had been marching at their rear ran to position on the new left of the line, while the mounted and foot scouts who had been out all day now appeared in place on the right of the line of the regulars. The battle line was formed, with the regulars in the center as fighting backbone.

For some eight hundred yards the line moved through the forest, the men in the ranks seeing nothing except the ground just ahead of them, and none but the officers having any idea what it was all about.

Suddenly, from somewhere out of the gloom ahead came a prolonged steady R-r-r-r-rip! All along an invisible line of enemies this sound ran, while the air seemed full of bullets. Twigs were shot off the trees overhead; ground was

hurled up in little spurts, and two of the regulars in C Company dropped at the first fire.

"Lie down? Ready, load, at six hundred yards aim—*fire!*"

Not one of the soldiers had as yet seen one of the brown enemy, but a general engagement was on with all possible ferocity. It was not long before the regulars, acting under orders, rose and made a hundred-yard rush. Then followed a second hundred-yard rush, the Scouts on the flanks keeping with the regulars on every advance. Now the regulars were closing in on a numerous, stubborn enemy. If the rushes continued, the Moros not yielding, the opposed forces would soon be shooting down each other's throats!

On the right the Macabebe Scouts were withdrawing, both horse and foot. The horses had been left in low, sheltered ground at the rear.

Some of the regulars knew that the right wing of the little battle line had ceased firing for some time, though none of the regulars understood what it meant, save Captain Freeman.

For the time being the rushes stopped, but the opposing forces were firing at two hundred and fifty yards point-blank range. With so many bullets hissing through the air some of them must be doing something! Yet neither

Uncle Sam's men nor the Moros thought of giving way.

By and by one of Davis's men came crawling back up to the firing line. He whispered something to Captain Freeman, saluted and crawled back from the line.

Soon after the American firing died out by degrees. It was necessary to cool the rifles that had been used so briskly.

"Open magazines! Load magazines! Close magazines!"

So far the magazines had not been employed. The new order meant—something!

Immediately afterward all was still along Uncle Sam's line. The Moros, too, were stopping their firing. Lieutenant Prescott, standing just behind where Sergeant Noll crouched with his squad, murmured:

"Sergeant, I'd like to go on explaining about the sun, the plumb line and the true north-and-south line, but I'm afraid the time is not yet ripe. We'd be interrupted again."

"I am afraid so, sir," came from Terry, with a smile.

"But we'll get at it, Sergeant, the first chance. It is really a very simple matter."

Here the order went along the line to be prepared to rise and rush. Immediately after came the order of execution. Sixty yards of

ground were gained before the aroused Moros, still refusing to yield, opened such a hot fire that the order to lie down was given. But still the American forces received no order to return the fire. Not until——

Off to the northward a sudden rattling fire opened. The Moro volleys weakened.

"At will, commence firing!" sounded Captain Freeman's order, repeated by his younger officers.

The Scouts had withdrawn from the right of the line and crept to a point from which they were now pouring a hot flanking fire into the Moro ranks.

Soon the firing at will was stopped.

"Fix bayonets! Rise, forward march! Charge!"

Hardly had the troops started forward when, with a wild yell, swarms of Moros issued from cover.

Two or three moments were used up by the forces rushing at each other. Then steel met steel in the most savage hand-to-hand conflict!

CHAPTER XVII

BOXING UP THE MOROS

A FIERCE five minutes of it followed. When the Moros broke and fled back to cover the ground was strewn with the lithe brown bodies. Nor had Uncle Sam's fighting men escaped unscathed. Nearly fifteen per cent. of Captain Freeman's force lay on the ground, either dead or badly cut up by the Malay steel.

On gaining cover the Moros halted for an instant, to protect their own riflemen who were rushing to position for a last desperate stand.

The regulars were forced to halt, rather than go down in numbers before the fierce infantry fire that spat out into their faces. Men lying prostrate on their faces hurled the flame of their discharging cartridges almost into each other's faces. The fighting was too fierce to endure; one side or the other must give way. It was the Moros who soon yielded the ground, retreating swiftly.

Yet at first the regulars followed cautiously. It would not do to run into a Moro trap in the deep forest.

"They're in full retreat, the scoundrels!"

cried Captain Freeman, finally. "Press right on after the rascals, men!"

Through the forest the pursuing regulars made their way, leaping over obstacles. So they came out into the open on the further side.

Before the troops stretched a deep gully, flanked off to the left by a steep cliff. At almost the same moment the Philippine Scouts came out on the right flank. Down in the gully swarmed the retreating Moros. It looked as though the Malay leaders had taken their own men into a needless trap, but it was the only path of retreat that lay before the Moros.

"Halt!" yelled Captain Freeman. He had stopped his line of regulars close to the edge of the gully. Already the scouts on the right had taken position and had opened fire on the fleeing wretches below.

"Don't waste any ammunition, but fire at will, men, whenever you see a Moro head past your sights," ordered the American commander. "Steady, now! Commence firing!"

It was a fearful trap in which the Moros had been caught. Unless they charged against the infantrymen at the rear, or at the scouts on the right, the Moros had left the choice between dying in the depths of the gully, or of going up the steep, open slope at the further end of the gully.

Against this open slope every fleeing Moro would be sharply defined, an instant target for Uncle Sam's rifles. A score of frenzied Moros essayed this mad rush. Not one of them lived to reach the top.

Down in the bottom of the gully the huddled hundreds of the enemy could find hiding places in the brush and jungle. From this they fired back hotly, though with little effect, for the regulars and scouts above were too well placed behind natural cover.

R-r-r-r-rip! Cr-r-r-r-rack! rang out the volleys above, on two sides, American bullets tearing through the flimsy bush cover below.

Moros were dying in great numbers now. Above Uncle Sam's men kept up a grim, destroying fire. These soldiers were in a vengeful mood, for many a man now shooting steadily had lost a bunkie in the steel onset of a few minutes before.

Another batch of Moros tried the rush up the far slope. American rifle muzzles shifted, and swept that slope with buzzing bullets, mowing down the fugitives.

Now, braving the American fire, three or four hundred Moros rushed from cover, bent on racing up to Captain Freeman's position. These little brown men screamed hoarsely:

"We surrender! Stop firing!"

In token of their submission these Moros held their rifles high over their heads.

R-r-r-r-rip! Cr-r-r-r-rack! The American fire was faster now. Moros pitched and fell where they stood. Others who had followed, with frantic offers to surrender, dashed back to cover.

"It's fearful to fire on men who offer to surrender," gasped Noll in his chum's ear, as both sergeants paused a few moments to give their rifle barrels chance to cool.

"Yes," admitted Sergeant Hal. "But if we stopped firing those rascals would deny their own honor. They'd get upon us and then swing down their rifles and open fire again. The Moros have played that trick too often on American soldiers."

After a few minutes unarmed Moros, bearing white cloths as tokens of surrender, ventured forth from cover below. They were shot down. Uncle Sam's fighting men would take no chances with these treacherous Malays. Every foe killed was one the less to take part in a future uprising. Every Moro destroyed now might represent an American life saved in the future.

It was savage work, but war consists of such scenes. An honorable enemy may surrender as soon as he will, and be spared. But these

Moros were the Malay pirates of old, and their treachery is proverbial with all the white races.

R-r-r-r-rip! Cr-r-r-r-rack! The Philippine Scouts, those enduring, gritty little Macabebes, were steadily pursuing their work of destruction. Not a Macabebe would have been willing to see mercy extended to the enemy. The Macabebes know the Moros too well for that!

At last the infantry bugler, blowing with all his might, sounded the signal to cease firing. Rifle barrels could stand little more. Then the bugler of the Scouts followed suit. Very reluctantly did the little Macabebes obey.

As Uncle Sam's fire died out it was realized that no firing came from the bottom of the gully. It was not conceivable that all of the Moros were dead, but at least those who still lived were not taking the trouble to answer the cross-fire from above.

"I hope we got whole tribes of 'em!" sounded Private Kelly's voice above the stillness that followed.

"I imagine we did, Kelly," returned the quiet voice of Captain Freeman. "We have pumped thousands of bullets down into that gully."

Five minutes of silence, so far as battle sounds went, followed the cessation of firing. Then, out from cover below stepped an aged

Moro. His hair was nearly as white as the cloth fluttering from a stick that he held aloft.

"Don't fire unless others of the enemy attempt to follow him!" shouted Captain Freeman, briskly.

After showing himself the aged Malay had halted. Now, realizing that he was not being shot at, the Moro threw his head back, walking erectly forward and up the slope toward where Captain Freeman now showed himself.

These crafty Moros below had understood one American weakness, the mercy shown to white hairs. They had sent this petty chieftain of theirs to seek terms.

A hundred and fifty yards from the resting American rifles the flag-bearer halted.

"Do you speak English?" called Captain Freeman.

"I speak," replied the aged Moro, with difficulty.

"Approach, then,"

The Moro, apparently devoid of fear, stepped onward and upward, at length halting before the American commander.

"Well?" demanded Captain Freeman sharply.

"No well," replied the Moro meekly. "Many my people—dead."

"What do you want of us?"

"Let the Americans have mercy. We fight no more—we go in peace," replied the old Moro.

"Go in peace, after you have defied our government and fought our troops?" demanded Captain Freeman ironically. "You have murdered our planters, too. But now you find yourselves in a trap, and you weary of fighting. So you come to demand that, since it is no longer pleasant to fight, you be allowed 'to go in peace'! Do you take the Americans for fools?"

"What would you do with us?" demanded the Moro sadly.

"You wish to go in peace?" repeated Captain Freeman. "That means that you wish to be allowed to march out of this gully safely, bearing your arms away with you?"

"Yes," replied the aged Moro eagerly.

"You shall not do it. You are not men of honor, but fellows capable of any treachery. You shall not carry your arms from here."

"Then my people go on fighting."

"Well, let them," retorted Captain Freeman, dryly. "The longer your rascals fight the fewer there will be of them!"

"May we go in peace if we leave guns?"

"I will tell you what you may do," retorted Captain Freeman. "You rascals may proceed up the far slope, in small detachments, pro-

vided you go there without arms. But that will not be until I have sent word to the Scouts, so that a company of them may be there to receive your men as prisoners."

"Prisoners?" demanded the old man with a touch of dignity.

"Yes; all of you who do not surrender in accordance with my terms must stay in the gully and be killed. All who do peaceably surrender as I have ordered will be made prisoners, and taken to Bantoc. All the prisoners will have to stand trial for their crimes against the United States, and will have to face whatever punishment is meted out to them."

"My brothers below no say 'yes'," replied the aged Moro.

"Then go back to your people and tell them all to prepare to face death. We shall spare no man who does not surrender himself as a prisoner to the United States!"

"I will go to my brothers with your words," continued the old Moro. "Then I will come back and tell."

"It isn't necessary, and you needn't come back," retorted Captain Freeman decisively. "As soon as you see a company of Scouts at the top of the far slope you may send your men up that slope, fifty at a time. If a man among them bears arms he will be shot. Send forward

your surrendering men, fifty at a time, and do not try any treachery. If, within a reasonable time, your men have not begun to move forward as prisoners, then we shall open fire on you again, and after that there will be no chance whatever for any of you to surrender or to live long."

"My brothers no like. I will tell, but——'

"One moment," interposed Captain Freeman. "Sergeant Overton, you are a good signalman?"

"I have been so called, sir," Hal answered.

"Then signal to the Scouts my request that one company of them go to the head of the far slope, ready to receive prisoners."

Hal was speedily in communication, by wig-wag, with an officer of Scouts.

"They signal back that they're moving a company now, sir," Hal soon reported.

A few minutes later a company of Scouts appeared at the crest of the far slope.

"Now, go back to your people, and tell them of their one chance for life," ordered Captain Freeman.

Sadly enough the aged Moro turned, marching back into the gully, where he disappeared into a thick growth of brush.

Five minutes later a half hundred of the brown enemy went out from cover, moving up

the far slope. None of them carried arms. At the top of the slope they were received by the Scouts and placed under guard. Another detachment of the beaten enemy followed. At last the officer in command of the Scouts signaled Captain Freeman by wig-wag:

"Prisoners report they have all surrendered."

Then the captain of C Company of the Thirty-fourth marched his two detachments down into the gully. Here there remained only a half dozen Moros, who stood over a high pile of surrendered arms and ammunition.

"Sergeant Overton!" called Freeman.

"Here, sir."

"Take twelve men and build six or eight good-sized brush fires in a row."

"Very good, sir."

"Very hot fires, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

Within a quarter of an hour the fires were ready. Captain Freeman then issued his further orders, which were that all the surrendered rifles, swords and knives be placed across the fires and more wood piled on. It was found necessary to direct Sergeant Noll as to the building of a few more fires.

This was the most effective way of disposing of the great stacks of arms which could not be

transported to Bantoc. In the fires the steel edges lost their temper and rifle barrels were rendered useless for further service. The captured cartridges were taken along.

In the meantime searching parties had gone through the brush. The bodies of some six hundred slain Moros were found, showing how severe had been the fire poured in from above. There were also some two hundred of the little brown men too severely wounded to be able to stand the march to the coast. To nurse these wounded ones Captain Freeman released twenty of his more than four hundred Moros. The rest, under strict guard, were marched back to Bantoc.

Later on these prisoners were sent to department headquarters for trial. Some of the leaders in the late uprising were sentenced to from five to ten years in prison. Scores of them received six-month sentences, and a good many were released.

The punishment of the Moros had been so severe that further trouble in the Misamis district was not looked for for a long time to come.

CHAPTER XVIII

DRANEY'S LONG ARM POINTS

"THERE'S the same old town—the one place in these islands that its worth while to be in," exclaimed Private Kelly, with considerable enthusiasm for so confirmed a veteran as he was.

One of the army transports was making its way slowly along the Bay of Manila, on the way in from Corregidor. The steamship was nearly abreast of Cavite by this time, and it would not be many minutes ere the anchor chains would rattle and the transport be at rest at her mooring.

Private Kelly was standing near Sergeants Hal and Noll. Up on the saloon deck paced, among other officers, Lieutenants Prescott and Holmes. Somewhere between decks was Sergeant Dinsmore, the stenographer who had taken down the speeches of Joseph Draney at the guard house of Fort Benjamin Franklin.

These two officers and the four enlisted men were the witnesses who had been sent to Manila to appear against Draney, whose trial for treason was to take place before the highest court in the islands.

It was because they were to be used as court witnesses, and at this time of the year, that the two youthful sergeants were to have their examinations for officers' commissions at Manila. Otherwise, they would have been examined by a board at their own departmental headquarters. To meet the requirements of the court, and also not to sacrifice any of the rights of the two boyish sergeants, they were to be examined in another department than their own.

"Hal," nudged Sergeant Noll Terry, "you don't seem able to keep your eyes away from the officers on the saloon deck."

"Good reason why!" Overton admitted, with a frank laugh. "Noll, old chap, of course you know that my every thought and guess is on whether we'll soon go up from the spar-deck to the saloon deck! Whether we're to be real officers one of these days, or only sergeants."

"We'll be leaving a lot of fine, manly fellows among these same enlisted men if we do win commissions," sighed Noll.

"Yes; and that's also true of the office boy who is promoted to a clerkship in a business house," retorted Hal. "We'll leave a lot of fine fellows behind in the enlisted ranks, but we'll hope to find ourselves in another crowd of mighty fine fellows if we're ever permitted to hold Uncle Sam's commissions as lieutenants."

Something in Hal's steady gaze must have attracted the attention of Lieutenant Richard Prescott, for that splendid young officer presently came to the rail of the deck above, looked down, nodded pleasantly and called:

"Sergeant Overton, and Sergeant Terry!"

Both young non-commissioned officers turned squarely, stepped toward the companionway and briskly mounted, saluting.

"Men," inquired the handsome young officer, "how are you coming on now with your preparations for examination?"

"We think we're both fit, sir," Hal answered.

"Mr. Holmes and I will be at the Hotel Oriente while in Manila," continued Mr. Prescott. "We are anxious to see you both qualify for the honor of the good old regiment. If you wish any further drill, instruction or advice from us, please feel at liberty to ask us for appointments at such hours as none of us will be busy in court. Mr. Holmes and I are anxious to see both of you pass."

"Thank you, sir; we know that. You have been extremely kind to us," Noll answered gratefully. "If we pass, both Overton and myself will feel that we owe it to Mr. Holmes and yourself, and to other officers in the regiment."

"You will owe it mainly to yourselves," retorted Lieutenant Prescott pleasantly. "Al-

though enlisted men are allowed to rise to commissions, and scores of them do become officers, yet not one of them ever wins a commission unless he has in him all of the stern stuff that Uncle Sam demands of the man who is to rise in the military service. I expect that both of you men will pass the board."

"Thank you, sir," flushed Sergeant Hal.

"But bear in mind. The board in Manila holds only the preliminary examination. Next July you will have to return to the United States and take the final examination. If you pass the board, then make up your minds to study harder than ever from now on. If you pass your finals next July, then bear in mind that your success at that time wins only your commissions as second lieutenants. Afterwards, in later years, when you go up for first lieutenants, then for captains, then for majors —for each and every one of these steps you must pass a still harder examination. For the officer who fails to take the examination from one grade to the next highest there is but one fate—he must get out of the army. An officer's life, in these hard, progressive days, is made secure only by unceasing work and study."

"An officer isn't really safe, sir, until he has reached the grade of major?" hazarded Sergeant Noll. "When an officer is a major he

doesn't have to take any more examinations for promotions."

"That is true," nodded Lieutenant Prescott. "But, by the time an officer is a major he is middle-aged. From then on his advancement is guided by the most searching of all examinations, the inspection of that major's record during a score of years in the commissioned grades."

"Being an officer isn't all fun and play, I know, sir," Hal answered, "and, if it were, I wouldn't care to be an officer."

"You wouldn't, Sergeant?" demanded Lieutenant Prescott, eyeing Overton keenly.

"No, sir; for I don't want anything in life that is so easy that any man may have it. What I want in life, sir, is something so difficult that, when a man gets it by his own effort, his success stamps him as being very much out of the ordinary."

"Sergeant," remarked Mr. Prescott, laughing pleasantly, "you are spouting very much like some of our beloved professors back at West Point. But you have the right idea. No place in life is really worth the having if it is a place that any other fellow can get for the asking. Nothing but one of the top rungs on the ladder is much good, and the higher rungs can be reached only by a lot of hard climbing."

The transport was coming to anchor now. A few minutes later an Army launch bore the passengers across the bay and into the mouth of the Pasig River. Near the office of the captain of the port the passengers disembarked—Hal and Noll, and Private Kelly with them, not seeking one of the finer hostelries, but a boarding place that was within the range of their travel-pay allowance.

This place was found at last, on a small side street nor far from the Escolta.

"What was the officer-boy filling you up with?" inquired Private Kelly.

"With nothing," replied Hal. "He was offering us some very kind advice, and also stating that he and Lieutenant Holmes would be glad to give us any help they could before the examinations come off."

"And so you're going to leave us boys in the ranks," sighed Kelly.

"The boys in the ranks can follow if they want to," replied Noll. "The chance is open to enlisted men who can pass the examinations for commissions."

"And after we've faced the board," laughed Hal, half nervously, "we may learn that we're chosen to remain with the boys in the ranks. The examinations are no joke, Kelly."

"Here's one of your friends coming,"

nudged Private Kelly to his companions.

A brown-skinned native, at a little distance, was attentively studying the insignia on the young men's uniforms. Now, seeing that he had been noticed, the Filipino came forward, addressing Hal respectfully:

"You are of the Thirty-fourth, señor?"

"Yes," Hal nodded.

"And *sergentes?*"

"Yes; two of us are sergeants."

"Can it be possible that one of your is Sergeant Grierson?"

"No; he's of H Company," Hal replied. "My name is Overton, and my friend's name is Terry."

"Overton and Terry?" repeated the Filipino, slowly, as though trying to remember.

"You never heard our names," broke in Noll.

"No," admitted the Filipino; "I never heard the names. The name was Grierson."

"And why are ye so stuck on Grierson?" demanded Private Kelly.

"Your Sergeant Grierson once saved my brother's life."

" 'Twas a small service," contended Kelly.

"And now, señors, my brother is dead."

"Then Grierson didn't do a lasting job," remarked Private Kelly.

"But my heart it is full of gratitude for Sergeant Grierson," continued the Filipino. "For that matter, señors, my heart should be, and is, very warm toward any of the Thirty-fourth. It would be a great honor if I might be permitted to be of some service to you all."

"We appreciate your feelings and your intentions, and thank you," replied Sergeant Hal.

"Will you *soldados* (soldiers) come with me and drink some wine? Some beer?" proposed the Fliipino, smiling wistfully.

"Thank ye—not," replied Private Kelly. "We're real soldiers, if it please you, and we do not handle the stuff."

"Then——"

"You will excuse us, I am sure, when you hear that we are very busy," Noll put in politely, though firmly.

"But, señors——"

"To-morrow," offered Kelly gruffly, "or next week."

The three soldiers continued on their way so abruptly that the native knew himself to be finally dismissed. He did not attempt to follow them. Yet, slipping into a doorway, he remained there gazing after the three disappearing infantrymen.

"You would not go with me; you would not drink," muttered the native, under his breath.

"So I cannot serve through the easy task of poisoning your drink. Ah! You are soldiers, and proud! Señor Josefo Draney, he is fast behind the iron bars in the Carcel Central (central jail), but, my *soldados,* you shall soon find that even in Manila the Señor Draney has a long and powerful arm!"

CHAPTER XIX

FACING THE FIRST OFFICIAL HURDLE

JOE DRANEY'S case came up before the high court, but his lawyers were on hand with pleas for delay. As the Mindanao planter was on trial on most serious charges his attorney's requests could hardly be denied.

"Manila is pleasanter than Bantoc," smiled Lieutenant Prescott to his friend, Lieutenant Holmes. "I'm sorry for the officers we left behind at Fort Frank; they'll have a lot of extra work to do in our absence, but I don't see how we can very well help it."

"Anyway, Manila is a better place to be in," agreed Lieutenant Holmes.

Nor did Hal or Noll feel much bothered over the delay, during which they had no duties outside of being on hand when wanted. This arrangement gave them half their time for study

and half for exploring in the queer old places of the Philippine metropolis. Both young sergeants had money saved, and could stand an extra drain for pleasure.

With Private Kelly, however, it was much different. Kelly, with the happy-go-lucky disposition of many a soldier, had never been at pains to save his money. The government allowance provided for his "keep," but he had not much extra money to spend.

"You can borrow what you choose from us, you know, Kelly," Sergeant Hal proposed.

"Thank ye, and I cannot," retorted the soldier. "Private Kelly spends his money, when he has it, like a gentleman—and then goes broke like a philosopher."

It was not long, however, before the soldier found a different way of doing things. Having so much idle time on his hands, Kelly spent much of it, during daylight hours, in the little back office of an American merchant who complained over the difficulty of finding good clerks. The proceeds Kelly spent in the evenings. Saving was as far from his mind as ever.

"Here's hoping Draney don't go to trial until the week after a year from Thursday," said Kelly gleefully, one evening when he encountered the two young sergeants at their common boarding place.

"I can't say 'amen' to that," muttered Sergeant Noll Terry.

"And why not, me boy?"

"One of these near days our preliminary exams. will come off."

"Ye'll have abundant time for them, Sarge."

"But we're praying for this Draney business to be through with in time, anyway, so that we can go back to the United States in season for our finals next July."

"Even Heaven can't please every one," murmured Private Kelly thoughtfully.

Sergeant Dinsmore, the other enlisted witness, had found another boarding place down in the Malate suburb, so he seldom encountered his comrades in these days of rest.

One morning, a fortnight after arrival in Manila, Sergeants Hal and Noll each found an official envelope beside his plate on going down to breakfast.

"It's come!" gasped Hal.

"It must be that," agreed Terry, his breath coming fast.

Hal broke the seal of the envelope. Noll waited, in suspense, to hear the news from his chum.

"Report at ten o'clock to-morrow morning for the physical examination," announced Hal briefly, though his fingers trembled and his

voice shook. There was a mist in Noll Terry's eyes.

"At least, that's my orders," Sergeant Hal went on. "But open your own envelope, bunkie."

Noll did so, scanning with almost unseeing eyes the paper that he spread on the tablecloth.

"Same orders here," he stated.

Then, for some moments, the two young soldiers sat looking at each other, at the ceiling, the floor—at everything in sight save their breakfasts.

"It's come at last," spoke Hal, finally, in an awed voice.

"I wish it were over," returned his comrade.

"What? The physical examination. We're not afraid of that. The medical officers have to do all the work in the physical examination. Besides, we're sure of getting past the rainmakers (Army surgeons)."

"I wish we were through with the whole awful business," quavered youthful Sergeant Terry. "Hal, how long have we been in the Army?"

"You know as well as I do—three years, nearly."

"And we thought we'd be lucky if we could do it in four years."

"Or six years, for that matter. But Noll, we've not 'done' it until we pass the finals and get our commissions."

"Don't remind me," begged Terry. "I'm scared—plumb, cold scared! Hal, I don't believe we'll ever pass. At least, I won't!"

"Cease firing, if you can't aim better," grunted Sergeant Hal.

"But, honestly, aren't you scared, bunkie."

"Maybe I've been scared in battle, sometimes," smiled Overton quietly, "but I never demoralized any of the other fellows by admitting it. And I'm not going to scare you any worse by showing you how shaky I feel."

Noll looked at his smiling bunkie. Then both laughed and felt better.

"What's the good of looking at a breakfast?" demanded the jolly voice of Private Kelly, as that soldier entered the room.

"We were discussing our chances of passing the exams.," Hal informed him.

"Bedad, to my positive knowledge, you've been spending your time that way for the last year," grunted the private soldier, as he took his place at the table.

"It's still on our minds, Kelly," Noll admitted dryly.

"Bedad, the world will be seeming upside down when I have to answer you two lads with

a 'sir,' " remarked Kelly, as he helped himself to the meat and potatoes. "I suppose I'll have to be doing it, though, or else do me stretch at the guard house. But I'll take it out of the both of ye, though, behind your backs."

"Why don't you go in for a commission, Kelly?" demanded Hal.

"Who? Me, is it?" demanded Kelly, holding a piece of meat poised on the way to his mouth. "Now, what would I be doing with an officer's commission, and how'd I get one?"

"Study," retorted Hal. "Your record is all right and fine. A little study wouldn't hurt you."

"It'd do nothing worse than give me brain fever," grunted Kelly, taking a swallow of his coffee. "Once I took a look into them officer-papers—and I'll have none of them. I know enough, now, for Private Kelly, or maybe for Sergeant Kelly. But an officer? A sergeant's pay is more than I can take care of. Now, be the powers, what are ye paying board for? Not a swallow has gone down your working neck or your Sunday neck either."

Thus reminded, Hal and Noll fell to work. Yet, after all, they could find but little room in their stomachs while their heads were so full. They were still dawdling over their breakfasts when Kelly took his last swallow of coffee.

"A little work would do you lads good," was the private's parting shot as he left the room. "Ye're that idle that your appetites are going back on you."

Under their orders both sergeants had to report at department headquarters, during the forenoon, to acknowledge receipt of their orders. While making their report Hal and Noll were informed that the mental examinations would be held before the board beginning on the day following the physical.

"I'm glad it's going to be over soon," shivered Noll, as soon as the Army boys were out in the open again. "I'm afraid, if I go on shivering like this, I'll drop to pieces one of these days."

"Brace up and forget it for a little while," advised Hal.

"Where are you going? Back to quarters to do some final study?"

"Not another bit of study!" retorted Hal, sharply. "If we go on studying we'll turn into text-books. I don't believe you'd better do any more studying, either, Noll. If we don't know enough now, we're bound to fail anyway. Let's keep outdoors, moving around. Our brains will be clearer and our minds brighter when the moment comes to sit down to pen and paper."

Secretly Noll wanted to peep into his text-

books once again, but he allowed himself to be persuaded by his chum.

At ten the next morning both sergeants were on hand at headquarters. They found themselves in the room with nearly a score of other enlisted men who had been allowed to come up for examinations.

Just as it happened, Hal and Noll were the last pair to be summoned into the presence of the medical officers in the adjoining room.

"Strip!" came the brisk order from the senior surgeon present.

Hal did so promptly, neatly arranging his garments over a chair.

Noll took longer to accomplish it, and, when he stood forth, clad only in his clean, white skin, his lips were moving and his teeth knocking together slightly.

"Any fever?" asked the junior medical officer, reaching out and placing a finger on Noll's pulse.

"N-no, sir," all but chattered young Terry.

"Oh, a touch of stage fright, eh?" muttered the junior surgeon, with a pleasant smile. "Sergeant, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I'll wager you never shook like that when gazing at Moros through your rifle sights."

"I'll be all right in a moment," protested Sergeant Terry.

"Be all right *now,* man! I'm a surgeon, not a dentist. I'm not going to do anything worse to you than make you do some running and jumping."

"Brace!" grinned the senior surgeon, joining them. "What's got into the younger men of the Army these days? Half of the young men who have come before us shook, this morning, just as you're doing now, Sergeant. Don't be nervous among your friends!"

Noll's face flushed, but this good-natured teasing did him more good than any other course of handling would have done. Ashamed of his own nervousness Noll Terry made a strong effort to control himself.

At that moment, too, Noll chanced to meet the gaze of his bunkie.

Sergeant Hal Overton was leaning against the wall of the room, in an easy attitude of rest, his arms folded across his chest. Perhaps Hal, too, was nervous, but if he was no one else knew it.

"It's all gone, sir," reported Sergeant Terry, in steady tones.

"There wasn't anything to go," replied the senior surgeon dryly. "Sergeant, this is a stethoscope, not an instrument for cutting you open. This instrument is used for listening to your heart-beat."

"Thank you, sir. I've seen the stethoscope before, sir," Noll responded quietly and unassumingly.

His stage fright was all gone now. The Army boys were entering the first stage of the big game in their chance to win officers' commissions in the United States Army.

CHAPTER XX

THE MAN WITH THE MAUSER CARBINE

IT was all very much like the first examination that the Army boys had taken at the recruiting office. If possible, however, the present examination was even more searching, for the surgeons sought to discover whether their three years of service had brought upon either of the Army boys anything like a permanent disability.

"Lie down and let me get your pulse again," ordered the surgeon. Noll stretched himself out flat on the couch indicated. The army "rainmaker" waited some moments before feeling the pulse.

"Seventy-two beats standing; it slows down by the proper twelve when Sergeant Terry is lying down," announced the junior to the senior surgeon. "Now, Sergeant, get up, and

we'll see what you can do in the way of jumping."

The jumping finished, the stethoscope was again used over young Terry's heart. Running was next in order. Then the body over the other organs was pounded, the surgeons listening gravely in the meantime.

For some time the tests proceeded, the senior surgeon noting all the results on the official blanks provided for the purpose.

"That's all, men; you may dress," remarked the senior surgeon, at last. "Doubtless you're both interested in the conclusions. I can safely tell you both that there doesn't seem to be a doubt that you have passed the ordeal."

"I should think, sir," hazarded Sergeant Noll, "that any soldier who can pass the recruiting surgeon in the first place ought to be able to get by this board."

"That doesn't always follow, Sergeant," replied the senior surgeon. "Some men who come to us fail because of some injury incident to the service. Other men have dissipated, or otherwise abused themselves, since entering the service. Two of the candidates who appeared this morning will undoubtedly be rejected; possibly a third and a fourth."

Hal and Noll departed, feeling doubly thankful that they had always taken the best

possible care of themselves since enlisting.

Before leaving they reported to another officer at headquarters, who informed them that the mental examination would begin in four or five days, and that they would be given due notice.

"I hope the examinations and Draney's trial don't come off on the same days, sir," Hal observed, respectfully.

"That will all be taken care of," Lieutenant-Colonel Wilson promised them. "Every enlisted candidate's rights are respected and taken care of in connection with these examinations."

Though he had had really not a doubt of passing the physical tests, Hal Overton walked as though treading on air when he found himself on the streets again.

"Why does it make you so chipper?" Noll asked, curiously. "You didn't imagine you could fail physically?"

"No," Hal agreed. "But this morning's result is one more hurdle taken in the race for the commission, and I'm exultant over every barrier crossed."

"What shall we do this afternoon?" questioned Noll. "Study?"

"Hang study!" Hal Overton retorted, strenuously. "I'm through with study for the

present. Bunkie, I believe that there's such a thing as studying until you burn your studies into your brain, and then that useful organ is seared and incapable."

"What shall we do, then?"

"Do? Why, suppose we go back after luncheon and roam through the classic old Walled City of Manila? It's rich in curious and quaint old relics and reminders of the past."

"I'm agreeable," nodded Noll.

So, after their noon meal, and the brief siesta (midday nap) that every one takes in Manila who can, the two Army boys strolled over the bridge across the Pasig and entered the Walled City. They visited cathedrals and curio shops, stores and ancient public buildings, all with impartial interest. Darkness overtook the two Army boys in the Walled City while they were still rambling.

"Suppose we let the boarding-house dinner go by and try one of these Spanish restaurants?" suggested Hal.

"Paying for meals in two places at the same time is one of the easiest ways I know of getting rich," laughed Noll. "We'll do it for once."

So they dined on Spanish dishes, hot and spicy but made cooler by tumblers of the mineral waters that are sold so plentifully in hot

Manila. They listened to Spanish musicians and native singers, wound up with coffee and again fared forth into the night.

At first their way led past the *Cuartel de Espana,* the principal barracks in the Walled City, where a battalion of infantry was quartered.

"They are the doughboys who have the pleasant times," murmured Noll enviously. "All these city soldiers have to do is a little drilling, an inspection now and then, and some guard duty. Always close to the company kitchen, and with daily shower-baths."

"The easy times don't make the soldier," retorted Hal vigorously. "These doughboys may have an easy berth, but they are not learning the stern lessons of the fighting camp and of the column on the long, hot hike. Too much of anything like luxury spoils the soldier in time. I've heard the older officers say that."

"It sounds more like Lieutenant Prescott," grinned Noll. "Whew! I never knew a young officer so crazy for all the hard work."

"Unless it's Lieutenant Holmes," Hal amended.

"Yes; he's another with a work hunger."

"Well, don't you prefer the hard work of the soldier's life?" challenged young Sergeant Overton.

"That depends. I like some of it. But I like the grind mixed with a trace or two of the easy."

"You're taking a queer way, bunkie, to get plenty of the easy," jeered Hal good-humoredly.

"How?"

"By going in so earnestly for an officer's commission. If you win, you're signing your life away to hard work, for every step upward in a regiment means a huge lot of hard work behind."

"Yes," agreed Noll thoughtfully. Then, after an interval:

"Queer, isn't it, Hal, the idea that most people in civil life have about an Army officer? They imagine that his hardest work is to wear a handsome uniform, strut about and be admired by the girls."

"Or lead the german, or do some gallant work on the ball room floor," grimaced Hal. "If people who have such fool ideas could only see the Army officer as he really is—often in soiled working clothes for days, weeks or months at a time, working side by side with the private soldiers, and distinguished from his men only by wearing an officer's cap! In ancient times there may have been some soft snap about being a military officer. Nowadays, in

this country, being an officer means only that, while the men are often worked hard, the officer is worked harder."

"Yet people will point out that sometimes an officer gets leave for perhaps some weeks at a time," suggested Noll.

"Yes; after, maybe, the officer has worked seven days a week, and has been liable to duty at all hours of the twenty-four, for perhaps a year or two. How many civilians would want to earn their vacations that way?"

"You're right. A man who wants to loaf will do well to avoid the Army," nodded Sergeant Terry. "It's only once in a while that I feel as though I'd like to have it a little easier, just for a brief period."

"Well, haven't you been having that easier period since you arrived in Manila?" demanded Hal.

"That would be true, if I didn't have on my mind all the time that awful burden of the exams. that we've got to face."

"You're worrying too much," urged Sergeant Overton. "Man, if you fail in this exam. you can take another."

"But I don't want to fail this time!"

"Neither do I, but worrying won't help me to pass."

Talking rapidly the Army bunkies had

Sergeant Hal Lurched Forward and Fell.

turned into a straight, long street that led at right angles out of the one on which the big barracks faced.

Behind them a native had been sauntering, yet careful not to lengthen his interval from them. This long, straight street was quite deserted at this hour of the night, as most of the dwellers along this thoroughfare retired early, after the fashion of many well-to-do natives, who rise at dawn, then sleep through the hotter part of the day.

Down the street Sergeants Hal and Noll, strolling along, neared a street lamp.

Upon one knee dropped the Filipino, drawing swiftly from under his clothes a battered Mauser carbine that looked as though it might have seen service in the days of the Philippine insurrection under Aguinaldo.

There was a strong hint of the old Spanish cavalryman in the fashion in which the native brought that carbine up to his shoulder and sighted. The light from the street lamp ahead was calculated to serve the fellow's aim well.

Bang! In that narrow, gully-like street the carbine's shot echoed loudly.

Sergeant Hal Overton lurched forward slightly, then pitched and fell.

Bang! sounded the second shot, directed at Noll Terry.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CALL FOR STRETCHER BEARERS

THAT second shot missed Noll, who first halted squarely, bent over his companion, then wheeled as though to rush at this assailant of the night.

Bang! This time Noll fell, and lay prone, still.

Bang! sounded up the street, but this time the shot was fired as an alarm by an alert sentry. The last shot was followed instantly by a stentorian hail of:

"Corporal of the guard! Post number three!"

Other forces, however, were destined to be at work before the corporal of the guard could get in effective operation. A patrol of six men, headed by a sergeant, had been going through the streets nearby, seeking to pick up two men from the barracks who had overstayed their leave off the post. In a twinkling this patrol was moving on the run for the scene of the shooting.

The instant that the Filipino saw Terry pitch and fall he was up on his feet, flying past them like a little brown racer. Past the two

still figures he sprinted, nor did he throw away the Mauser carbine.

As he heard the patrol in full pursuit behind him the Filipino resorted to a native trick. Holding the weapon over his head, the muzzle pointing backward, the running native rapidly discharged the remaining cartridges.

Unaimed, the bullets did not find a mark, though they whizzed down the street with a dangerous inquisitiveness that made the members of the patrol wince a bit perhaps.

Finding that he was being overtaken, the Filipino, with the instinct of the hunted, Malay fatalist, dashed into a doorway. Here, behind the stone jamb, for a moment, the wretch was safe.

Swift as a flash he loaded the magazine. Then, leaning slightly out, the fellow began to pump the carbine at the patrol at close quarters.

"Halt! Kneel! Drive the scoundrel out of there!" ordered the grizzled old sergeant.

All too soon for the Filipino's comfort his own magazine was emptied. At the same moment the soldiers of the patrol began energetically to pump a tempest of bullets into that doorway. Had it not been for the darkness the soldiers would have riddled the body of that brown assassin.

As it was the storm of steel-jacketed lead broke down even the Filipino's sullen, stubborn courage.

"*Santa Maria!*" he cried shrilly, tossing the carbine out into the street. "Stop you shoot! I make me you surrender!"

"Shall we finish the goo-goo, Sarge?" demanded one of the soldiers hoarsely, as he paused to slip more cartridges into the magazine under his hot rifle barrel.

"If the fellow surrenders, take him alive!" commanded another voice, that of the officer of the day at the *Cuartel de Espana.*

Not unjustly eager to avenge the blood of two slain comrades the soldiers might have wound up the life of the assassin then and there, but the officer's command was not to be disregarded.

"Hold the prisoner there, Sergeant," ordered the officer, briskly. "I'll go back and see how badly hurt our own people are."

With that Lieutenant Groves retraced his steps up the street. Hal and Noll both lay face downward, not moving.

"Can you speak at all, Sergeant?" softly demanded the lieutenant, resting a hand on one of Hal Overton's arm.

"Very quiet, if you please, sir," whispered Sergeant Hal, in a low but very steady voice.

"Oh, then you're conscious? What do you mean, Sergeant?"

"Sh! Easy, sir. I beg to report, sir, that it's very important for that native to think he has killed us both, sir."

"Why?" asked the officer, astonished, yet dropping his voice to a very low whisper.

"It is very important, sir, that the native does not see or hear any signs of a conversation. I ask this, sir, to serve the aims of justice. Will you be good enough to tell the Filipino that he has killed us both?"

"I am a West Point man," returned Lieutenant Groves, in a whisper, though he spoke a bit haughtily. "One of the first lessons we learned at the Military Academy, Sergeant, is that a lie is beneath an officer's dignity."

"It would serve the ends of justice in great shape, sir, if the Filipino could get that impression and retain it after he is locked up. I can tell you a lot more, sir, when he is out of sight, but if he is given any chance to suspect now, sir, it will defeat important plans."

"Lie still," returned Lieutenant Groves, in the quietest of whispers. Rising, he went over and pretended to be busy examining Sergeant Terry for signs of life, though he managed to whisper softly:

"Never mind what I do, Sergeant; lie still."

Having, apparently, conducted a hopeless inspection of both prostrate young non-commissioned officers, the officer of the day rose, turning and striding back to the patrol.

There was a look of utter sternness on the lieutenant's face as he commanded:

"Sergeant, I charge you emphatically to see to it that this prisoner has no chance to escape. If any officer at the barracks questions you as to the charge on which this fellow is arrested for, reply that it is by my order, and that the charge is the cold-blooded murder of two non-commissioned officers of the Army."

"Very good, sir," replied the sergeant, saluting. "Shall I have hospital corps men sent with stretchers to remove the bodies?"

"Do so, Sergeant. I will remain on the spot until the stretcher bearers arrive."

"Prisoner in the center of the second file; patrol march," commanded the sergeant, after saluting his officer.

Lieutenant Groves thereupon returned to where the two sergeants lay. The instant that the patrol had rounded the corner into the street above Sergeant Hal leaped to his feet, saluting very formally. Noll had quickly followed suit.

"Now, Sergeants, you will explain what all this mystery means," requested the officer of

the day in a commanding tone of voice.

"You have heard of the coming trail of one Joseph Draney, sir?" counter-queried Sergeant Overton.

"The planter from Mindanao? The fellow to be tried for treason? Yes; I know of the case."

"We are important witnesses for the government, sir, and Draney hates us most of all as being the two men who first caught him in the act of landing arms and ammunition. He has threatened us with the vengeance of death, sir, and this is not the first attempt that has been made on our lives."

"I think I begin to understand," nodded the officer. "But why were you so insistent that the Filipino should believe that he had succeeded in killing you both?"

"Because, sir," Hal Overton answered, his eyes shining brightly, "I mean to suggest to the authorities that this Filipino, who believes that his aim was successful in both cases, be sent over to-night to the *Carcel Central,* and there be shoved, as though by accident, into the same cell with Joe Draney. If arrangements are made beforehand, sir, I think listeners will hear the Filipino report his success to Draney, and will also hear Draney make a reply that will settle the crime partly on him. It will be

another nail driven in the evidence against the fellow, Draney, sir."

"And you planned this, Sergeant, from the time you fell so naturally as to make the Filipino feel sure that he had got you?" demanded Lieutenant Groves, in a voice of very evident admiration.

"No, sir; it didn't occur to me at once, sir," admitted Hal.

"Then why did you fall at the shot."

"Sergeant Terry and I, sir, are candidates for commissions. This forenoon, sir, we both passed successfully the physical tests. As I heard that shot and the whistling bullet it instantly flashed through my mind what a pity it would be to get hit, and perhaps to receive an injury that would forever unfit me to take the examinations. So I fell."

"Your name, Sergeant?"

"Overton, sir."

"Sergeant Overton, you must have been told before, by your officers, that you are an exceptionally quick-witted young man."

"Thank you, sir."

"Haven't you been so told before this by your officers?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Sergeant Terry, why did you fall?" followed up the officer of the day.

"He threw me," grinned Noll, indicating his bunkie by a nod of his head. "My knees are skinned, sir, I went down so hard."

"Threw you? How?" insisted Mr. Groves.

"Why, sir, when I heard that first shot, I turned to see what had happened to my bunkie, sir. The second shot went by within an inch or so, but didn't even wing me. I turned to make a dash at the Filipino, but Sergeant Overton's hand gripped the toes of one of my shoes and the trap pitched me. Just after I fell I felt a sharp squeeze on the toe, and so—begging your pardon, sir, I 'tumbled' to the trick and kept quiet."

"Hm!" muttered Lieutenant Groves dryly. "Sergeant Terry, I suspect you also of being quick-witted."

"Not guilty, sir," rejoined Noll, without a trace of drollery in his tone. "It was all done by my bunkie."

"Sergeants, I know nothing about you except the little that you have told me, and what I have seen of you two. But on what I know already I venture to express the wish that you succeed in your fight for commissions."

"Thank you, sir," replied both Army boys, saluting.

"And I shall turn in a report of what I have observed and heard to-night," continued the

lieutenant. "It may reach the board in season to add to your previous records on the points of quickness and soundness of judgment."

"Thank you, sir."

Again both Army boys saluted.

By this time the hospital corps men with stretchers were seen coming down the street. Lieutenant Groves, followed by the two non-commissioned officers, went forward to meet them.

"You won't need the stretchers, men, I am glad to say," stated the officer, in a low voice. "But you will refrain from letting the fact become known while the Filipino prisoner remains at the guard house. That is a positive order.

"Very good, sir," replied the acting sergeant of the hospital corps, saluting, and falling in with his men at the rear.

Hal and Noll were led into the military post by another than the guard-house entrance, and soon the two soldiers were in telephone communication with Lieutenants Prescott and Holmes, and, presently, with the city authorities.

While they were thus engaged Lieutenant Groves stood nearby, assuring himself:

"I am afraid I managed to convey to that Filipino the impression that he had succeeded

in his wicked work. However, I didn't tell him so. I merely placed him under arrest on a charge of double murder. Of course, such a trifling thing as a charge of murder can afterward be changed to conform with the subsequently-learned facts."

Lieutenants Prescott and Holmes were not long in reaching the *Cuartel de Espana,* where they confirmed all that Hal and Noll had said about the Draney case.

The authorities, too, were quick to act.

Joe Draney was in solitary confinement in a cell of lonely situation at the *Carcel Central.* It was possible, near at hand, to secret witnesses.

So, when the Filipino, who gave the name of Tuna, and who was subsequently recognized as having been an officer under Aguinaldo in the big insurrection of older days, reached the *Carcel Central* the police official in charge there scratched his head, regarding the prisoner, dubiously.

"Can't you take this prisoner somewhere else?" he demanded. "We're badly crowded here."

"The fellow is remanded here," responded the officer in command of the escort.

"Then I suppose I'll have to take him," grunted the jail official. "Yet the only cell I

can put him in is the one now occupied by the prisoner, Draney."

At mention of that name Tuna tried to hide the quick gleam in his eyes.

So it happened that Tuna was led straight to the lonely cell of Draney.

"Sorry, your highness," grunted the jailer, "but I've got to berth smaller fry with you for to-night."

With that the door was opened, Tuna was pushed inside and the door slammed, locked, after which departing feet sounded down the corridor.

"I succeeded, Excellency," whispered Tuna. "Both sergeants are dead!"

"Good!" growled Draney. "But if you had not succeeded others would have done so. Though a prisoner I am in the city of my friends. If your sergeants, and mine, come to life again, a dozen of my bravos are still ready to strike!"

CHAPTER XXII

"LITTLE WILLIE" AND THE REAL THING

A FEW sorrowing hearts beat in Manila under the khaki blouses of soldiers.

These were the young men who, full of hope and alive with ambition, had become candidates for commissions.

Official communications from the president of the examining board informed these young men that they had failed to pass the surgeons for promotion.

Sergeants Hal and Noll, however, thanks to the excellent care they had taken of themselves, whenever possible, since entering the service, were in excellent condition, and passed the surgeons without qualifications.

On the morning appointed, the young soldiers who had got by the surgeons appeared before the full board, which met at the minute of nine o'clock. These candidates numbered fifteen. One of the number, however, was not yet sure that he would get by the medical authorities. Pending the settling of the doubt this soldier was allowed to take the mental examination.

"The board will come to order," announced

the presiding officer briskly. "Candidates, attention!"

Fifteen young soldiers, standing at attention in line, listened to the opening remarks by the president of the board. The candidates were informed that each man was expected to take the examination without cribbing or other improper help. Any candidate in doubt about the meaning of the question would be allowed to ask any proper question, but no man could hope to pass unless he were well grounded in the subjects in which he was to be examined.

"That's me," Noll ungrammatically informed himself. "Hal may stand some show, but if I get by this board I shall never allow any one to knock the goddess of good luck again in my presence!"

"For the morning session," continued the president, "the candidates will be examined in arithmetic and algebra. As fast as each candidate finishes his examination in arithmetic he may hand in his paper. Then he will receive his paper of questions in algebra. Between arithmetic and algebra each man may take a few minutes' rest if he so desires and if he is sure that he can spare the time. The answers in both papers must be in at noon. Any man not having finished by noon can be marked only on as much work as he turns in, all unanswered

questions being marked zero. The candidates will now go to their desks, and each man will find the arithmetic questions on his desk. Fall out! Go to your desks."

Fifteen young men with flushed faces obeyed. Hal picked up his paper, and found that it contained ten questions. The first one seemed very easy, dealing merely with the amount of money that a given sum of money would earn at a stated interest for a certain length of time. The second looked somewhat harder. It read:

"A garrison consists of sixty cavalrymen, ninety artillerymen, 150 engineers and 225 infantrymen. A guard detail of seventy men is required. What number should each organization properly furnish?"

But the questions became harder the further one went in them. For instance:

"What is the amount of $100 at 5 per cent. compound interest for nine years?"

This looked simple. Any grammar school graduate ought to figure out the answer in a few moments. But these directions accompanied the question:

"Use logarithms and geometrical progression."

The grammar school boy is expected to understand geometrical progression, but the youngster in the grammar school who knows

anything of the use of logarithms is rare indeed.

Question number seven, "At what time between 11 and 12 o'clock are the hands of a clock opposite each other?" was not difficult. It called only for the use of a little thought and good sense.

But questions nine and ten called for the finding of values by the use of logarithms.

"This exam. isn't exactly a picnic, but I think I can make good," decided Sergeant Hal.

"Whee!" was Sergeant Noll's first thought, as he struck some of the harder questions. "I may get through with this, but what's the use? I'll lose my reason, anyway!"

What some of the other candidates thought was plainly enough told by their flushed, worried faces.

In thirty minutes Hal Overton had finished his paper. He spent five more in going over his work. Then, rising, soldierly and erect, he stepped forward, coming to attention.

"Sir, I have to report that I am ready to turn in my paper, sir."

"Very good, Sergeant Overton; if you do not wish to look it over any further."

"I am satisfied to turn it in, sir."

"Do you wish your algebra paper now, Sergeant, or do you prefer to rest?"

"Am I allowed to take a turn about in the air outside, sir?"

"No; you may not leave the room until noon."

"Then I would like my paper now, sir."

Hal received it and walked back to his desk, meeting the envious look of Noll Terry, on whose forehead beads of cold perspiration were standing out.

It was against the rules for Hal to speak to his chum, but he sent Noll what he intended as a smile of encouragement.

Then Sergeant Overton sat down to see what the United States government wanted to know on the subject of algebra. The first question was in the form of an algebraic expression, which the candidate was to clear of fractions and reduce. Though some of the problems did not seem hard of solution by arithmetic, each had to be solved by methods of algebra. Question number four read:

"Three years ago A's age was ½ of B's and nine years hence it will be ⅝ of it. What is the age of each?"

Question numer ten read: "A regiment of troops was drawn up in a solid square with a certain number on a side, when it was found that there were 295 men left. Upon arranging the regiment so that there were five more men

on each side no more men were left. How many men were there in the regiment?"

At 10.55 Sergeant Hal stepped forward with his finished paper in algera. Again he was the first to finish.

"You are dismissed, now, Sergeant, until 1.30," stated the president of the board.

Gladly enough the Army boy escaped from the room in which so many others were suffering. Candidates were perspiring over their papers; officers on the board were leisurely examining and marking such arithmetic papers as had been turned in. Most of the candidates were now grinding out their hearts over algebra.

It was just two minutes before the closing hour of the morning session when Noll came limply out. He found his bunkie seated under a tree, reading one of the Manila daily newspapers.

"Well, you're alive, aren't you?" demanded Hal.

"Yes," confessed Noll. "But I'm wondering what's the use of living."

"The exams. didn't look so very hard."

"Didn't, eh?" grumbled Noll.

"I may have made a lot of mistakes," admitted Hal. "But I thought it was all easy enough while I was going through the work."

"That's right!" rumbled youthful Sergeant Terry resentfully. "Rub it in! But say, what answer did you have to number four in arithmetic?"

Hal and Noll went over the question as they remembered it, and found that each had reached the same result.

"What did you say to number four in algebra?" demanded Noll.

Again the two bunkies compared notes.

"We didn't get it the same," sighed Noll. "One of us had it wrong, and I've a private suspicion that I'm the one."

"Perhaps I had it wrong, too," hinted Hal consolingly.

"No; I don't believe you had. How about number nine in algebra?"

By this time most of the other candidates had vanished in search of places in which to eat the noon meal.

"We'd better go and get it unless we want to fast until evening," proposed Hal. So the chums sauntered away, but took pains to be back in the board room punctually at the minute appointed.

For the afternoon they dallied with ten problems in geometry.

In the evening Noll had to coax his apeptite for dinner. Private Kelly listened with only

half sympathy to Terry's recitation of the trials of the day.

"And ye have to answer all of them nosey questions before ye can be declared fit to be an officer and a gentleman?" demanded Private Kelly half scornfully. "Bedad, I'm thinking it's schoolmasters, and not fighting leaders, that the Ar-rmy wants!"

So have thought many people who have looked into the subject of examinations for Army questions. Yet in every subject the Army officer really needs the knowledge for which he is examined. An Army officer to-day is not merely a drillmaster and a leader of charges. He must be a broadly educated man or he cannot fulfil the duties of his position.

The next morning the candidates received ten more posers in geometry; in the afternoon five problems in trigonometry.

On the third day they were confronted with five more problems in trigonometry and ten in surveying.

As they left headquarters that afternoon Noll commanded earnestly:

"Hal, look me squarely in the eyes."

"Well?"

"Tell me the truth!"

"About what?"

"Do you see any signs of lunacy beginning

to crop out in me?" said Noll earnestly.

"Not yet," laughed Hal.

"Well, you will, soon, if this sort of thing keeps up," declared Sergeant Terry, moodily.

"Nonsense, bunkie! You knew what you had to face. Both of us did."

Private Kelly went to sleep, that evening, in his chair while Noll was repeating some of the questions of the day.

The next morning there came a brief breathing spell—twenty questions in Army regulations. This was a subject with which each candidate was expected to be wholly familiar, and most of them were.

But in the afternoon came ten questions in international law. Some of them were:

"What is the Monroe doctrine? State its political principle."

"Distinguish between 'citizenship' and 'domicile.'"

"How are questions of international law settled? Give proceedings and define the different methods."

Following this mental torture came ten searching questions on the Constitution of the United States.

That evening Noll tramped homeward, weary and sore. As soon as he got inside his room Private Kelly rapped on the door and entered.

"How's me aching genius to-day?" demanded the soldier dryly.

"Kelly," cried Noll, shaking his fist, "I've got a thrashing in store for some one!"

"Not me, I hope," muttered Kelly, drawing back. "Not me, by the look that's in your eye!"

"No," muttered Noli bitterly. "The fellow I want to find and pummel without stopping, for a whole week, is the fellow who wrote the books about soldiers that I used to read when I was a school-going youngster."

"And what of thim story books?"

"It was this way, in the lying story books," went on Noll savagely. "Little Willie was always wonderfully bright and absolutely fearless. Now, Kelly, did you ever hear of a soldier who didn't know what fear was?"

"Once," admitted the soldier reflectively. "But that chap died back some time before the Civil War. Me heart's always in me mouth at the beginning of a skirmish."

"There were two soldiers who didn't know what fear was, Kell," Noll insisted. "One, your old fellow, who died a century ago. The other was little Willie, of the story book. Now, you know how little Willie got his promotion. He was everywhere in the thick of the fight in that mad day—in the story book. At the end

of the fight, when the regiment had been cut in two by the enemy's bullets——"

"Anny r-regiment that was ever sworn in'll run like an automobile before it's cut in two," broke in Kelly contemptuously.

"Don't interrupt—the story book," commanded Noll. "When the fight was over, and the live soldiers were piling up the dead soldiers as breastworks to be used on the morrow, the old colonel always strode over to Little Willie."

"And well I remember what he said to little Willie—in the story book," cried Kelly.

"Yes! The colonel always said: 'Willie, you've been a real hero to-day. Now, for your reward. Your captain is dead. Go over and take command of the company, Willie.'

"Kell," cried Noll, sternly, "that story book writer didn't know—simply didn't *know*—that it takes an act of Congress to make an officer out of a boy under twenty-one. That writer didn't know that a colonel hasn't any legal right to promote any man in his regiment to be an officer. That idiotic author didn't know that a colonel could only *recommend;* that a candidate has to take *two* examinations, six months apart, and that only the President of the United States can appoint commissioned officers, with the consent of the Senate. Nor did

the imbecile writer of the story book know that the President is powerless to commission any man as an officer unless the candidate can pass two examinations of a kind that would make a mere college professor look like the dead man pictured on a postage stamp!"

"Oh, come, now, Noll," interposed Hal, laughing, "it isn't quite as bad as that."

"I won't take any credit to myself," retorted Noll. "If I get by the board it will be because, by some strange freak, I answered the questions right while I was in a trance. But all the same I'd like to get hold of the fellow who wrote the Little Willie books that got me in wrong. I'd pound him for a week and then drown him!"

CHAPTER XXIII

KELLY TAKES SOME EXERCISE

TEN questions in general history and in the history of the United States, twenty in geography and seventeen in English grammar—these were the next ordeals presented by the board.

There were ten questions in chemistry and six in electricity, followed by ten in elementary mechanics. In the latter field here are some

of the posers that were asked of the Army boys:

"Define force; give the expression for the force which acting on a body of mass M would produce an acceleration A. If V be the velocity at any time, give the expression for the momentum of the body."

"LL is a needle free to rotate in a horizontal plane about the point P. F and F′ are the forces acting upon it. Is the needle at rest for its present position? If not, show position for equilibrium; give the expression for the moment of each force tending to produce rotation from the present position."

"A well 100 feet deep and 10 feet in diameter is full of water. How much work is done if the well is pumped dry, the water being discharged at the surface with a velocity of 32 feet per second? Assume g=32 and 1 cubic foot of water = 63 pounds."

That evening Noll became more gloomy and despondent than ever, while Hal appeared to become correspondingly cheerful.

"How do you do it?" asked Noll enviously.

"If I'm going to be hanged, I'm going to be hanged—that's all," Hal rejoined lightly. "I'm going to enjoy the time until I am hanged."

"Enjoy these days?" demanded Sergeant

Terry. "Come, now; you must think I'll believe a lot!"

"I'm not worrying," Hal asserted. "At the very start I decided that worry would hinder, not help."

There came an afternoon when the candidates found themselves through with their exams., though they did not yet know the result. Instead of feeling a sense of relief at the finish of their ordeal, most of the young soldiers now waited in an agony of suspense.

"All candidates who have completed the examination will report here at ten o'clock in the morning on the day after to-morrow," directed the president of the board. "By that time it is hoped that the board will have been able to determine any points that may be in doubt about any of the candidates."

The candidates filed out in orderly manner, for they were soldiers and the idea of discipline was ever-present.

Outside most of the young men paused to look at each other. For a few moments no word was spoken. Then half a dozen suddenly began together.

"I had no idea that it was going to be so tough," grunted one young soldier.

"I didn't imagine I was expected to know more than an encyclopedia," said another.

"What good will all that stuff do us in battle?"

"I'm glad the exam. was as comparatively easy as it was."

This last came from Hal, and caused most of the other candidates to gaze at his gaspingly.

"*Easy!*" came the chorus.

"I'll put it another way," replied Hal. "I'm glad that the exam. was no more difficult. I was afraid it would have been a lot worse."

"If it had been," uttered Noll grimly, "I can see myself going home on a transport in the care of the hospital sergeant who bosses the happy squad."

"Happies" are soldiers who go mildly and harmlessly insane. There are not many such cases in the Army, but there are bound to be some, just as there are a few cases in any small city whose population equals the number of men enlisted in the Army.

"Well, come along home, Noll," urged Hal, seizing his bunkie by the arm. "Either we've passed, or we haven't, and in either case we've nothing to worry us to-night."

"Are you faking that cheerfulness, old fellow?"

"Not a bit."

"You really feel cheerful all the way through?"

"Yes; why not?" laughed Hal.

"Bunkie, you've got a lot of nerve, then. Do you realize that you will have to face another examination, as bad or worse, six or seven months from now?"

"So will you."

"No," rejoined Sergeant Noll Terry, shaking his head. "I didn't pass this board. But I think you have done it."

"I don't believe I have, if you've failed," maintained young Sergeant Overton.

"Oh, yes, you have. You could't miss it—sir."

" 'Sir,'—to me?"

"I'm practising," grimaced Noll. "In a few months—sir—you'll be an officer and I'll still be a doughboy non-com. I'll have to say 'sir' to you always when that time comes, and I'd better begin practising early."

"Noll, I believe you're in the dumps; you're funked blue at the last minute. You've been scared cold by worry."

"Wait and see who passes, and who doesn't," retorted Terry.

They were still talking on the prospects when the two Army boys crossed the Pasig River and continued on their way up to their boarding place. The sun had set and darkness had come on fully by the time that Hal and Noll

turned the corner into the street on which their boarding place was located.

Hal was slightly in the lead as the two Army boys turned in through the doorway. As he stepped into that dark, unlighted place a figure bounded out at him.

Wholly unsuspicious of any attack coming, Hal would have been caught wholly off his guard had it not been for the flash of steel in the air before his face.

It was only instinctively that Hal threw out his left arm to guard. He thus fended back his assailant for an instant, but the fellow would have been back and at him in another instant, with every chance of success, had it not been that quick-witted Noll sprang in under Hal's arm. Their assailant discovered instantly, that he was facing two men.

There was a sharp, quick clinch. The point of a knife grazed over the skin on the back of Noll's left hand, and a line of red followed the steel.

But by this time Sergeant Hal had the assailant, who proved to be a native, in a clinch from behind that could not be broken. Turning, he pushed the fellow down the steps.

"What have ye there?" demanded Private Kelly, running up.

"Another of Draney's pets, I guess," mut-

tered Hal grimly. He had the Filipino's arms pinned, so that the native, though he still clutched the hilt of his knife, could not use it.

"One second," muttered Kelly. "Hold him so, Sarge, and I'll have his teaser away from him."

Private Kelly gave the native's wrist a wrench that made the brown man scream with pain. But Kelly had the knife. Stooping, he calmly broke the knife blade against the pavement and tossed the pieces away.

"Get a policeman, Kelly," directed Sergeant Hal.

"Now, Sarge, let me do this job a different way," coaxed Private Kelly. "You two step inside the house and leave this fellow in my hands. He'll not be bothering you again."

"Hear that goo-goo howl," muttered Noll, as ear-piercing shrieks smote their ears.

The shrieks still continued, though from a greater distance. Kelly knew a soldier's trick that worked excellently with natives who had a bent for assassination.

"That fellow's had his lesson, Sarge," Kelly reported. "His spirit's broken."

Whatever Kelly had done it was something effective, and, as he had predicted, no further attempts by Draney's brown allies were made against the life or safety of the Army boys.

"Now, in the morning," declared Kelly, as the soldiers seated themselves at table, "we'll go and see the law take care of the Moro kingpin—meaning Draney. For while ye were out to-day the summonses were left here for us. Misther Draney's trial begins at nine in the morning."

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

IT would be useless to weary the reader with the details, picturesque as they seemed at the time, of Planter Joseph Draney's trial for treason.

No witness did the rascally planter summon in his own behalf. His lawyers contented themselves with trying to break down the solid, clean-cut testimony of the Army witnesses.

In the end Draney went on the stand in his own behalf; but he contented himself with either denying or trying to explain away the damaging statements made by the witnesses for the prosecution.

The trial did not occupy quite a whole court day. Late in the afternoon Joseph Draney was found guilty of the crimes charged against him. He was sentenced to serve

a term of twenty years in Bilibid Prison.

To the end Draney kept his nerve. He was cool, smiling, impudent. He was cheery, in outward appearance, even when he was led away to the prison conveyance. It must have been mere outward composure, for well did the planter know that no appeal would avail him. He had been convicted on overwhelming evidence, furnished by witnesses of the highest standing for truth and honor.

Right here it may be said no more attempts were made against the Army boys that Draney could be suspected of having influenced. The planter shared the fate of all evil men when they go to prison on what is practically a life sentence. Joe Draney, locked up in Bilibid, was in every sense a fallen leader. He might live to step from prison a free man, but by that time he would be old and broken, a man unfit to lead or to plot dangerously.

So the Moros, the dattos and chieftains whom he had secretly served for so long, for a money consideration, forgot the Joe Draney who lay in prison and who could not help them in their schemes of blackmail and brigandage.

Yet these same brown chieftains felt the loss of Draney, as was shown by the long spell of good order in the Misamis district of the big island of Mindanao. The Philip-

pine Scouts were moved off to other scenes.

American planters soon began to flock to Bantoc and neighborhood. There are thriving plantations there now, and the planters and their families live in undisturbed security.

Commerce thrives at the little port. The natives are obedient to the law and fairly industrious. The soldiers now stationed at Fort Benjamin Franklin would wax fat and sleek from inactivity, did not the commanding officer wisely see to it that they are furnished with exercise in the form of drills and practice marches.

Mokka was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and Tuna to eight. Both are still behind the bars. They snarl whenever they pass their former leader, Draney.

On the morning after the trial, at ten o'clock, all of the fifteen candidates who had taken the mental examination were on hand. Each face was either flushed or very white.

The candidate who had been admitted to the examination with a doubt as to his physical condition was found barely to have passed the surgeons, but he had failed in chemistry and elementary mechanics. In all, seven of the fifteen had failed in the mental ordeal, though all could have another chance in a year if they felt equal then to passing.

"The candidates who have passed this preliminary examination successfully, and in the order in which they have passed are——" began the president of the board, picking up the list.

Sergeant Hal Overton's name was third on the list of those who had passed. Noll Terry's was seventh. Noll, who had been rather white-faced, suddenly flushed, but there was a gleam of wild joy in his eyes. Hal took the announcement of his success as calmly and easily as he had borne himself all throughout the ordeal.

"Those who have passed," continued the president of the board, "are undoubtedly aware that they will, in all likelihood, be ordered to the United States next summer. There, before another board, they will take a second and final examination. Men—you who have passed this board, I trust I need not urge upon you that the months between now and the next examination must be months of continued study. Your next examinations are likely to be much harder than the ordeals through which you have passed through here. But you will feel, I am sure, that, if a commission in the United States Army is worth having, it is worth striving hard for. For myself and the members of this board, men, I extend our congratulations to the candidates who have suc-

cessfully taken this first ditch. To those who have failed I extend the sympathies of the board. That is all, men."

"Gentlemen," added the president, turning to the officers who had conducted the examinations with him, "I hereby declare this board dissolved."

"Hold me," whispered Noll, as soon as he got outside.

"Why?" smiled Sergeant Hal.

"I feel that I'm likely to do something foolish. I may even toss up my sombrero and let out a loud whoop."

"Would that be dignified conduct in a future officer of the Army?" laughed Hal.

"What will Kelly say?" quivered Noll.

"He'll be sure to say that he can't see what you're so excited and puffed up about," rejoined Sergeant Overton. "Noll, don't let your head get swelled. Even if we pass our final exams next July, and even if we also receive our commissions as second lieutenants, it won't be anything to lose our heads over. You know, and so do I, that both the enlisted men and the older officers call a second lieutenant only a 'new shavetail.'"

"But a second lieutenant is an officer," Noll came back warmly. "The second lieutenant has passed the dividing line between the mere

enlisted man and the officer. The second lieutenant is just as truly a real officer as is a general. The only difference between them is in the matter of rank and in the size of the command. And every second lieutenant may hope to become a general before his military life is over."

"Stop there, Noll," teased Sergeant Hal merrily. "There's a fly in the ointment."

"The second lieutenant may, in time, become a mere, ordinary general, but there is very little chance that the 'shavetail' will ever become President of the United States."

"Humph!" grunted young Sergeant Terry. "Who wants to be President as long as he may be a military officer?"

All the way back to the boarding house the two delighted young candidates talked merrily. Private Kelly, despite his appearance of bored lack of interest, was waiting on the steps for them.

"Tell me nothing," said Kelly.

"You don't care to know?" demanded Noll.

"I do know," said Kelly. "Little Willie has been patted on the back by the president av the board. And—since ye both seem to be wanting the thing so much—I'm overpowerin' glad that ye've hitched your freight to a general's star."

"The general's star, if it ever rises to our

shoulder straps, is at the other end of life, Kelly," replied Hal.

"The other end of life, is it?" demanded Kelly. "Well, isn't one end of a stick of candy as sweet as the other?"

By this time Kelly had lost his grip on the bored look. He was pumping the hands of both comrades with unaffected enthusiasm.

"If 'twas me catechism would pass me, and me familiarity with the footpaths of the Misasmis district, I'd be going up before the board meself for an exam.," admitted Kelly. "But what's the use? The heart in me would be sore at leaving behind me too many fine fellows in the ranks."

"There are a lot of fine fellows in the ranks," rejoined Hal simply. "But, if I do get up to the shoulder straps I shan't feel that I'm leaving any of the men in the ranks. We'll all be together, no matter what kinds of trimmings we may wear on our uniforms."

Soon after the two young sergeants went very modestly to the Hotel Oriente to report their success to Lieutenants Prescott and Holmes. Both young officers were very cordial, and very hearty in their congratulations.

"You'll both pass the finals all right," Lieutenant Prescott declared, with an air of conviction.

"We were fearfully scared at West Point," smiled Lieutenant Holmes, "but we're still in the service."

A few days more of waiting there were, ere officers and men were able to go aboard a southbound transport for Bantoc.

A short voyage, and our friends of the Army were back in Bantoc, taking up once more the routine of garrison life.

Kelly, however, found one change in his affairs. Captain Cortland handed him his appointment as corporal, duly signed by Colonel North, commanding officer of the Thirty-fourth U. S. Infantry.

And here we must leave the Army boys briefly. The parting will not be for long. Much more happened to them.

What this was must be reserved for the next volume. In the coming narrative we shall learn how Hal Overton and Noll Terry made good, or failed to do so, and all the circumstances. The new volume is published under the title: "UNCLE SAM'S BOYS AS LIEUTENANTS; Or, Serving Old Glory as Line Officers."

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